

**AN ACTIVITY THEORY ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSITION PROCESS INTO FURTHER
EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SOCIAL EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH
NEEDS**

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the transition process for young people with social emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties, from mainstream secondary school into further education colleges, with particular reference to what is happening at a systemic level. Activity theory was used as a theoretical framework and methodology to examine the sociocultural processes involved in transition, highlight contradictions and offer recommendations for future practice. Individual semi-structured interviews were utilised in the research to explore the views of secondary school staff, further education staff and educational psychologists. Activity theory provides a further level of analysis to consider cultural and historical issues in relation to findings from previous literature.

The results illustrate the complex and multi-faceted nature of the transition process for young people with SEMH. Suggested learning and recommendations from this research include developing clear role definitions within the transition process, considering ways to promote support and continuity for young people in the time between leaving school and beginning college, developing new tools to support learners at the level of SEN support and ensuring aspirations and targets set for young people are realistic and achievable. Finally the research concludes in acknowledging that whilst education settings are striving to support the transition needs of learners with SEMH, they are often constrained by issues at a much wider level.

DEDICATION

To my wonderful parents Bridget and Mick Edwards

To my fiancé Richard

To my family

Your love, unwavering support and continued belief, has given me the strength to
achieve my dreams.

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CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|--------------|
| 1. CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1. Introduction to thesis | 1 |
| 1.2. Rationale | 1 |
| 1.3. National context of the research | 2 |
| 1.4. Local context of the research | 3 |
| 1.5. Research aims and questions | 4 |
| 1.6. Thesis structure | 5 |
| 2. CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW | 7 |
| 2.1. Introduction | 7 |
| 2.2. Transition in education | 8 |
| 2.3. A sociocultural view of transition | 9 |
| 2.4. Sociocultural frameworks of transition | 10 |
| 2.4.1. Consequential transitions | 10 |
| 2.4.2. Symbolic transitions and identity rupture | 13 |
| 2.4.3. Communities of practice | 15 |
| 2.5. Becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) | 18 |
| 2.6. Social emotional and mental health difficulties | 20 |
| 2.7. SEMH and educational context | 21 |
| 2.8. SEMH and post-16 | 25 |
| 2.9. EPs in transition | 26 |
| 2.10. Previous research on transition and SEMH | 28 |
| 2.10.1. Data Sources and Search Strategy | 28 |
| 2.10.2. Transition of young people with SEN | 28 |
| 2.10.3. Education Provision | 30 |
| 2.10.4. Staff Knowledge | 31 |
| 2.10.5. Stigma | 33 |
| 2.10.6. Relationships | 34 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 2.10.7. Conclusion | 38 |
| 2.11. Research Questions | 39 |
| 3. CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN | 40 |
| 3.1. Introduction | 40 |
| 3.2. Rationale for research design and positioning the methodology | 40 |
| 3.3. Activity Theory | 43 |
| 3.3.1. Theoretical origins | 43 |
| 3.3.2. Generations of activity theory | 44 |
| 3.3.3. Key concepts in activity theory | 47 |
| 3.3.4. Contradictions | 48 |
| 3.3.5. Application of activity theory | 50 |
| 3.4. Summary of methodology | 51 |
| 3.5. Method and data collection | 52 |
| 3.5.1. Context | 52 |
| 3.5.2. Participants | 52 |
| 3.5.3. Recruitment data collection and analysis | 52 |
| 3.5.4. Semi-structured interviews | 54 |
| 3.6. Ethical Considerations | 55 |
| 3.7. Method of analysis | 57 |
| 3.8. Methodological considerations | 59 |
| 3.8.1. Credibility | 60 |
| 3.8.2. Resonance | 61 |
| 3.8.3. Sincerity | 61 |
| 3.9. Summary of chapter | 62 |
| 4. CHAPTER 4 RESULTS | 63 |
| 4.1. Introduction | 63 |
| 4.2. Individual activity system themes | 65 |
| 4.2.1 Secondary school staff themes | 65 |

| | |
|---|---------|
| 4.2.2 Further education staff themes | 67 |
| 4.2.3 Educational psychologist's themes | 69 |
| 4.3. Understanding of SEMH | 71 |
| 4.4. Second Generation Activity Theory Analysis | 73 |
| 4.4.1. Subject (Role in relation to the transition process) | 73 |
| 4.4.2. Object (The focus of work) | 74 |
| 4.4.3. Outcomes | 76 |
| 4.4.4. Rules | 77 |
| 4.4.5. Community | 90 |
| 4.4.6. Division of labour | 92 |
| 4.4.7. Tools | 94 |
| 4.5. Contradictions | 97 |
| 4.5.1. Primary contradictions | 98 |
| 4.5.2. Secondary contradictions | 99 |
| 4.6. Summary of chapter | 100 |
| 5. CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION | 102 |
| 5.1. Introduction | 102 |
| 5.2. Policy | 102 |
| 5.2.1. Education Health and Care Plans | 102 |
| 5.2.2. Raising of compulsory school age | 104 |
| 5.3. SEN support | 105 |
| 5.4. Information sharing | 107 |
| 5.4.1. Collaborative working | 107 |
| 5.4.2. Age of consent | 108 |
| 5.5. Stigma | 110 |
| 5.5.1. SEMH difficulties | 110 |
| 5.5.2. Inclusion of learners with SEMH | 111 |
| 5.6. Knowledge of SEMH | 111 |
| 5.6.1. Complex needs | 111 |
| 5.6.2. Austerity | 112 |

| | |
|--|---------|
| 5.7. Transition Support | 113 |
| 5.7.1. Preparation | 113 |
| 5.7.2. Level of Support | 114 |
| 5.8. Identity | 116 |
| 5.9. Pedagogy | 117 |
| 5.10. Environmental factors | 119 |
| 5.11. Summary of chapter | 121 |
| 6. CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION | 122 |
| 6.1. Introduction | 122 |
| 6.2. Reviewing the research aims and questions | 122 |
| 6.2.1. Question 1. What supports the transition of young people with SEMH into further education? | 123 |
| 6.2.2. Question 2. What constrains the transitions of young people with SEMH into further education? | 124 |
| 6.2.3. What is the role of the EP, if any, in the transition process? | 125 |
| 6.2.4. How are secondary schools and colleges working together in the transition process? | 126 |
| 6.3. Implications for Professional Practice | 126 |
| 6.4 Impact of Research and Future Directions | 129 |
| 6.5 Reflections on Research | 130 |
| 6.6. Concluding Comments | 132 |
| REFERENCES | 133 |
| APPENDICES | 143 |

LIST OF APPENDICES

| Appendix number | Description | Page |
|------------------------|--|-------------|
| 1 | Application for ethical review | 143 |
| 2 | Information letter to heads of schools | 154 |
| 3 | Information letter to staff | 155 |
| 4 | Consent form | 157 |
| 5 | Semi-structured interview schedule | 158 |
| 6 | Example of participant activity triangle diagram | 160 |
| 7 | Example of initial coding of data | 161 |
| 8 | Example of potential theme map | 162 |
| 9 | Example of thematic map for superordinate themes | 163 |
| 10 | Summary report of research | 164 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Chapter | Figure | Description | Page |
|------------------|---------------|---|-------------|
| Chapter 2 | 2.1 | Semiotic Prism (taken from Zittoun, 2008, p.168) | 14 |
| | 2.2 | Components necessary for social participation (adapted from Wenger, 1998) | 15 |
| Chapter 3 | 3.1 | First generation activity theory model (taken from Daniels 2001) | 44 |
| | 3.2 | Second generation activity theory model (Engeström, 1987, in Leadbetter 2002) | 45 |
| | 3.3 | Third generation activity theory model (Engeström, 1999b) | 46 |
| | 3.4 | Cycle of expansive learning (Engeström 1999b) | 49 |
| | 3.5 | Semi-structured interview schedule | 54 |
| Chapter 4 | 4.1 | Thematic map for secondary school staff themes | 64 |
| | 4.2 | Thematic map for further education staff themes | 66 |
| | 4.3 | Thematic map for EP themes | 68 |
| | 4.4 | Detailed thematic map showing the activity system of transition | 70 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Chapter | Table | Description | Page |
|------------------|--------------|---|-------------|
| Chapter 2 | 2.1 | A description of the different forms of consequential transition (Beach, 1999) | 11 |
| | 2.2 | Permanent and fixed term exclusions data for 2014/15 by primary need (DFE 2016) | 24 |
| Chapter 3 | 3.1 | Five key principles of activity theory | 47 |
| | 3.2 | Levels of contradictions | 48 |
| | 3.3 | Final participant groups and roles | 53 |
| | 3.4 | Ethical issues considered in the research and how they were addressed | 55 |
| | 3.5 | The six phases of thematic analysis and steps taken in the research | 58 |
| | 3.6 | Overview of research activity and timeline | 59 |
| Chapter 4 | 4.1 | A table to show themes for understanding of SEMH | 71 |
| | 4.2 | A table to show subjects by professional role and group | 74 |
| | 4.3 | A table to show themes for the object of work | 75 |
| | 4.4 | A table to show themes for the outcome of work | 76 |
| | 4.5 | A table to show themes for supportive rules | 77 |
| | 4.6 | A table to show themes for constraining rules | 82 |
| | 4.7 | A table to show themes for the community involved in transition | 91 |
| | 4.8 | A table to show themes for division of | 92 |

labour in the activity of transition

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 4.9 | A table to show themes for the tools used in transition | 95 |
| 4.10 | A table to show ways contradictions can occur | 97 |
| 4.11 | A table to show primary contradictions with corresponding quotes | 98 |
| 4.12 | A table to show secondary contradictions with corresponding quotes | 99 |
| 4.13 | Superordinate themes | 101 |

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

| | |
|-------|--|
| ADHD | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder |
| AER | Application for Ethical Review |
| BESD | Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties |
| BPS | British Psychological Society |
| CAMHS | Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service |
| DFE | Department for Education |
| DfES | Department for Education and Skills |
| EBD | Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties |
| EP | Educational Psychologist |
| EPS | Educational Psychology Service |
| FE | Further Education |
| HLTA | Higher Level Teaching Assistant |
| JSNA | Joint Strategic Needs Assessment |
| LLDDs | Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities |
| LSYPE | Longitudinal Study of Young People in England |
| NEET | Not in Education Employment or Training |
| SEBD | Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties |
| SEMH | Social Emotional and Mental Health |
| SEN | Special Educational Needs |
| SENCO | Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator |
| SES | Socio Economic Status |

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to thesis

This thesis was written in part requirement toward the three year Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Birmingham.

The introduction to this thesis will outline the rationale for undertaking this research including my own prior experiences, which contributed to my interest. It will then briefly discuss the national and local context of the focus area before moving on to highlight research aims and the structure of this work.

1.2 Rationale

The rationale for this research grew from my previous position working as a therapeutic care worker in a residential school for boys with social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH). Following their time in school, many of the young people that I worked with, were unable to maintain a successful transition into further education (FE), often resulting in them not being in education employment or training (NEET). This fostered a curiosity to understand what was happening in the process of transition and led me to question what mechanisms of support were in place for this vulnerable group of young people.

Initial reading of the literature highlighted that this phenomenon has already been researched in relation to young people with SEMH making the transition from specialist settings into post-16 education (O'Sullivan, 2011). Where the gap in the

literature presides is for young people with SEMH transitioning from mainstream settings into post-16 education. This is discussed further in chapter 2.

1.3 National context of the research

With changes in government, often comes change to legislative reviews and policies (Norwich and Eaton 2015). In recent years there have been multiple changes to policy and legislation that have impacted on education. The most significant change in relation to special educational needs (SEN) has been the introduction of the new Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (2015). This saw radical reforms in the way that children and young people's SEN were met, with an emphasis on person centred planning and integrated education health and care plans that provide support to young people up to the age of 25 if needed.

Within this new code of practice there is also an emphasis on planning a clear transition, including into further education and beyond into adulthood. Transition has traditionally been used as a term to refer to the physical move between settings that young people experience during their school education. However, as argued throughout this thesis, transition is not just a physical move but conceptualises a shift in identity (Lam and Pollard 2006).

Transition experiences in early years and from primary to secondary school have been well researched (Evangelou et al. 2008). Yet Arnold and Baker (2012) have previously highlighted that the transition from statutory education into further education, employment or training has not yielded much attention from

psychologists. Historically, EPs have not been involved in further education, which may explain the dearth of research in this area. Indeed, Mackay (2009) concludes from his research on post school EP services that these services do not exist outside of Scotland. However, the changes in legislation have widened the scope and landscape in which EPs can work, making this a prominent topic to research.

In addition, this research comes at a time when initiatives to tackle the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training have resulted in a rise in compulsory school age to a young person's 18th birthday (Education and Skills Act 2008). This was introduced in 2015 and consequently the impact and implications of this are still being explored. The raising of compulsory school age will mean that more children and young people will be making the transition into further education. Given the diversity of courses and options that colleges offer, they often cater to the needs of the most vulnerable young people.

1.4 Local context of the research

The present research took place in a unitary authority in the east of England. It is important to understand the local setting, as Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead (2008) point out 'Children's success or failure in passing through formal educational transitions cannot be assessed without regard to local education practices and sociocultural context' (p.37). According to Public Health England (2016) the local authority in which this research took place is one of the 20% most deprived unitary authorities.

The most recent information available from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2015) highlights high levels of childhood poverty, low levels of GCSE attainment and poor health and wellbeing in comparison to the national average for England. In addition, the city at the heart of the unitary authority is considered one of England's fastest growing cities. It has an increasingly diverse population with 27% of children and young people from minority ethnic groups compared to 22% in the country as a whole (Ofsted, 2015). Many of these demographics have been highlighted as both risk factors for young people with SEMH and becoming NEET as argued in chapter 2 below.

1.5 Research aims and questions

The aim of this research is an exploration of the transition process for young people with social emotional and mental health difficulties from secondary school into further education. There are many studies exploring the outcomes of the transition process but less looking at the process itself (Williams, 2015). Central to this thesis is the analysis of this activity from the perspective of secondary school staff, further education staff and educational psychologists (EPs). Activity theory provides a sociocultural lens through which to analyse the process as described further in chapter 3. The research questions as identified through exploration of the literature are as follows:

- 1) What supports the transition of young people with SEMH into further education?
- 2) What constrains the transition of young people with SEMH into further education?

- 3) What is the role of the EP, if any, in the transition process?
- 4) How are secondary schools and FE colleges working together in the transition process?

1.6 Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis is set out across six chapters. This first chapter has endeavoured to give a brief introduction and rationale for conducting the research and outlined the national and local context in which the study is situated.

In chapter 2 of this thesis an overview of transition will be provided through considering prevalent sociocultural theories of education. The implications of the complexity of transition will be discussed in relation to young people with SEMH and the concept of becoming NEET. A review of the current literature relevant to this area will then be presented.

Chapter 3 will go on to discuss the research design and methodology with particular emphasis on the use of activity theory as a sociocultural lens through which to explore the research aims and questions. Justification and reflections on the methodology will be provided with potential limitations to the research discussed.

A detailed picture of the results will be presented in chapter 4, with themes identified through thematic analysis presented in tables relating to each of the different areas of activity theory. The primary and secondary contradictions highlighted through analysis will also be outlined.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the superordinate themes identified, alongside consideration of the previous literature highlighted in chapter 2. In addition, any further areas of research not previously reflected on are included where relevant.

Finally, chapter 6 will draw together the findings and discussion to summarise the research in relation to the research aims and questions. Implications for practice for educational psychologists and other professionals will be proposed before offering concluding comments.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter will be to explore the current literature relating to transition in education, in particular the transition from mainstream secondary school into further education for young people with social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH).

I will begin by exploring the term transition through a sociocultural lens. Different frameworks will be presented and discussed to highlight the multifaceted and complex nature of transition. A brief overview of consequential transitions (Beach, 1999), symbolic transitions and identity rupture (Zittoun, 2006) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) will be presented.

The concept of becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) will be explored and associated risk factors highlighted, particularly for young people with SEMH difficulties. In addition changes in Government policy and guidance will be discussed and the implications this may have.

I will then go on to present the existing literature around transition to further education (FE) for young people with special educational needs (SEN) focussing in on young people with SEMH. The rationale for the focus of this research will be highlighted throughout the following sections. The conclusions drawn will form the basis of my research questions.

2.2 Transition in education

The term transition is generally defined as change from one position or stage, to another (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016). In education it is typically used to refer to the significant shifts that children and young people undergo throughout their school experiences (Fleischer, 2010). These shifts can be external, such as the transition from primary to secondary school, or internal, such as the transition from childhood to adolescence. Invariably these different kinds of transition will co-occur as the timing of transition in school has been strongly influenced by developmental stages, as discussed below.

The concept of transition in education is underpinned by developmental psychology and a number of different models have been proposed. The earlier work of influential psychologists such as Erikson (1968) and Piaget (1976) position transition as occurring due to external factors. Piaget (1976) proposed that child development occurs through a series of universal stages. Progression through these stages was thought to be driven by a process of disequilibrium. He proposed that children develop schemas through which to understand the world and new information is assimilated into these schemas. When information does not fit within their current schema it causes a state of disequilibrium. This then forces a change of their world view to create equilibrium. Thus the emphasis is on external factors causing an internal change.

Erikson (1968) also proposed a staged theory of psychosocial development. He suggested that there are eight stages from infancy to adulthood with each stage

occurring in a predetermined order. He placed a lot of emphasis on the period of adolescence and positions this stage as crucial for identity development. In thinking about transitions in education, this period of time includes significant transitions from primary school to secondary school and secondary school into post-16 education. During each of the stages, Erikson posits that 'crisis' will occur whereby there will be conflict between the psychological needs of the person and the social needs of society (Mcleod, 2013). Again, this theory contends that external factors (the social world) cause internal change.

These developmental stage theories fed into important concepts in education such as readiness to learn and were the prevailing framework for understanding children's transitions for decades (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008). The main critique of these theories was the way in which the child was positioned as passive in this process rather than an active participant from birth. In contrast to stage theories, sociocultural theories place more emphasis on the contexts that inform transition. Crafter and Maunder (2012) argue the concept of internal change being triggered by external situations is too simplistic and in order to understand the complex nature of transition, it needs to be viewed through a sociocultural lens.

2.3 A Sociocultural view of transition

Sociocultural theories stemmed from the seminal work of Vygotsky in 1978. In opposition to the stage theory of child development proposed by Piaget, Vygotsky suggested that children develop through reconstructing cultural knowledge from the communities to which they belong (Vygotsky, 1978). In this vein, activity is the focus

of analysis rather than the individual and the child's development is mediated through social interaction with the people and world around them. Therefore in thinking about transition from a sociocultural perspective it is understood 'not as a moment of change but as the experience of changing' (Crafter and Maunder, 2012, p.4).

Several theorists have proposed different sociocultural frameworks underpinned by the ideas presented by Vygotsky. In their paper arguing for a sociocultural view of educational transition, Crafter and Maunder (2012) discuss three such frameworks for exploring transition; consequential transitions (Beach, 1999), symbolic transitions and identity rupture (Zittoun, 2006) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Examples from educational research are presented throughout their paper, although none make reference to the transition from secondary school into further education. However, the frameworks are relevant in demonstrating the multifaceted nature of transition in education and can be applied across educational contexts. I will give a brief overview of each of these frameworks in turn.

2.4 Sociocultural frameworks of transition

2.4.1 Consequential transitions

Beach (1999) was concerned with the concept of learning 'transfer', a construct in education, which refers to the carrying of learning from one context to another. He argued that the notion of transition moves beyond just the carrying and application of knowledge across tasks and that the fundamental flaw of theories at the time was neglecting the role that context brings to bear. Thus he contends that 'transfer'

needs to be reconceptualised within a sociocultural understanding, underpinned by the premise 'that learners and social organisations exist in a recursive and mutually constitutive relation to one another across time' (Beach, 1999, p.111). He thus offered the theory of 'consequential transitions'.

The 'consequential' part of transition refers to the impact on the individual or society. Beach (1999) proposed that consequential transitions 'involve a developmental change in the relation between an individual and one or more social activities. A change in relation can occur through a change in the individual, the activity or both' (Beach, 1999, p114). He describes four different forms of consequential transition:

Table 2.1 A description of the different forms of consequential transition (Beach, 1999)

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Lateral Transitions | Unidirectional and perhaps the most commonly thought of kind of transition in education. For example, the move from primary to secondary education or secondary into post-16 education would be aligned with lateral transition, whereby the new activity is seen as a developmental advance. |
| Collateral transitions | Describe simultaneous transition within two or more historically related activities, for example moving between home and school. They may or may not engender an explicit notion of developmental progress. |

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Encompassing transition | Occurs when an individual is adapting to existing or changing circumstances of an activity. The activity can be stable relative to the changing individual becoming a full participant in that activity or activity can undergo a prompt change relative to the stability of the participant. Thus an example in education could be the change in Government guidance raising compulsory school leaving age and how post-16 staff adapt to the inclusion of new learners. |
| Mediational transition | Transition that occurs where an activity is yet to be fully experienced. It involves mediation or a 'third object', which acts as a developmental bridge between two systems to facilitate developmental progress. For example, taking part in vocational training as a bridge between leaving school and entering employment. |

These differing forms of consequential transition have the potential to inform change through multiple ways depending on the context in which they take place. Overall, the emphasis is on the change in identity that occurs within the individual through reconstructing knowledge and making sense of the transition itself.

Beach's work highlights the complexities of what he terms 'consequential transitions' yet he also acknowledges that 'there is much that we have yet to figure

out about how schools can support students in becoming someone or something new, negotiating the boundaries of multiple and sometimes contradictory activities, and changing their participation in these activities as the activities themselves change' (Beach, 1999, P.131). He suggests that if schools facilitate these transitions, overtime new systems of artifacts can be created that can be shared with others. In doing so, it will ensure that history does not repeat itself and others do not battle through the same problems. Accordingly, having a full understanding of what the 'problem' is in transition will be important for making positive changes in the future.

2.4.2 Symbolic transitions and identity rupture

Zittoun (2006) suggests that all transitions involve processes of identity, learning and sense making. Her work focuses on the social and cognitive resources available to a person during times of transition and the interactions between them. She refers to 'ruptures', which are moments of uncertainty or disequilibrium. These may encompass change in a cultural context, change to a person's social sphere of experience and change in relationships or interactions. Following a rupture are processes of transition in which a person moves towards a new form of equilibrium.

From this perspective, the dimensions of the transition process, identity, learning and sense making, are represented through a model termed a 'semiotic prism', as depicted in the figure below. In turn this prism is located within a social frame. Transitions occur through progressive reconfigurations of the semiotic prism, which are ultimately supported by the social frame in which they take place.

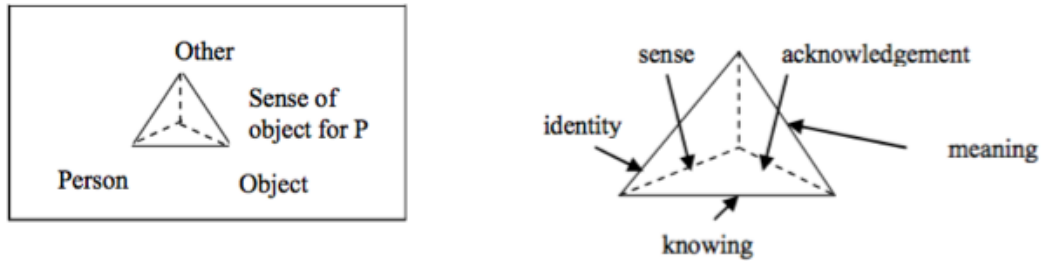


Figure 2.1 Semiotic Prism (taken from Zittoun, 2008, p.168)

For example, in a case study described by Zittoun (2008) a young girl who had disengaged from education was helped to realise through the social frame of the school, that there was a mismatch between the social demands (*meaning*) and the professional training that she had wanted to undertake (*object*). She was then supported by staff to consider an alternative, more realistic career goal and the previous *object* was replaced with a new one. This made personal *sense* to her without damaging her self-*identity*. Thus a reconfiguration of her semiotic prism had taken place. The social frame of the school supported this reconfiguration through providing structure, a thinking space, support and a bridge to the next stage of her development.

Zittoun's (2006) framework highlights how the dynamics of an institution play a fundamental role in supporting or constraining a person's access or ability to use resources for successful transition. She concludes that 'if transitions are ultimately the processes through which change and development might occur, then institutions who's aim is to support young people's learning and development should pay careful attention to the ways in which they support, or not, transition processes within their frame, to their frames, or out of them' (p.177). This provides rationale for

undertaking my research.

2.4.3 Communities of Practice

As Crafter and Maunder point out, Zittoun's (2006) and Beach's (1999) models of transition emphasise the role of identity and the change that takes place within the individual. Wenger (1998) proposes Communities of Practice as a theory, which also emphasises the change that takes place in the community around the individual. His, is a social learning theory whereby the primary focus is on learning as social participation. He describes participation as 'being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities' (p.xvi). The components necessary for participation to take place are shown in the figure below.



Figure 2.2 Components necessary for social participation (adapted from Wenger, 1998)

A community is defined by a shared interest, where members engage in joint activities to develop a shared practice with shared experiences, resources and tools. We can be part of multiple communities at any given time, for example work, school or home (Wenger, 1998).

In considering this in relation to transition, it is the process of joining and becoming a member of a new community of practice. This will of course engender a change in identity as a person learns new rules and practices. Yet in accepting new members, the community itself will also be subject to change. Through interactions it adapts to the new members and refines its practices thus transforming the social structure in which learning takes place (Wenger, 1998).

Crafter and Maunder (2012) highlight multiple transitions in education to which this framework has been applied. For example Dockett and Perry (2004) applied the theory in exploring children's experience of starting school. They note that it is through a child's interactions within the school community that existing practices are learnt and renegotiated. These interactions were explored through the children's eyes, which contributed a valuable insight to learning and transition from a context that was different to that seen by adults. Through these insights the researchers sought to change the community itself through refining its practice.

However, practice in schools is likely to be influenced by multiple factors at the wider organisational level, which will not be directly accessible by children themselves. Although it is acknowledged that children do not exist in isolation and

are influenced by many other social and physical contexts, this aspect of organisational culture is somewhat missing from this account. Wenger (1998) holds that practice and institution are different entities and their relationship is one of negotiated alignment rather than congruence. However, this view does not dismiss the influence of the institutional context on communities. It is the organisation, which develops the rules but the community that puts them into practice. Thus practice is a response to, rather than, a direct result of institutional design.

Understanding the complex relationship between these factors may be pertinent in understanding those practices that lead to unsuccessful transition. Indeed it is important to reference those times when transition does not occur successfully due to the negative outcomes this can lead to. As Hodges (1998) points out, Wenger does not spend much time in this framework talking about when people do not become successful members of a community.

Crafter and Maunder (2012) acknowledge three key commonalities across these differing frameworks. The first being the acknowledgement that transition is not merely a physical move but can take many different forms including learning new skills and developing knowledge. Secondly, there is an emphasis on the importance of relationships in facilitating successful transition. And thirdly is the recognition of the personal journey and reconstructing of identity that people undergo in the process. Although there is recognition of the cultural context and importance of institutional factors within these frameworks, the focus is primarily on the transition

processes at the individual level. I feel there needs to be further emphasis of the interactions with the systems within which these transitions occur.

Exploring these frameworks has demonstrated how viewing transition through a sociocultural lens can enlighten us to the intricacies involved in the process, consequently widening our scope of understanding. Given the complex nature of transition, it is perhaps understandable why some transitions may not always happen successfully.

2.5 Becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

There are many periods of transition experienced throughout education. One period of time in which transition may be particularly complex is moving from secondary school into post-16 education. This often encompasses a substantial physical change in environment but also a shift from adolescence into young adulthood. The transition from adolescence to adulthood has been identified as a key period for promoting independent and successful functioning in adult life (Beresford, 2004). For young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) this may be a particularly difficult time in which they need appropriate guidance and support.

For some young people this transition does not happen successfully, which results in them becoming NEET. According to the Office for National Statistics (2013) 'a person is NEET if they are aged 16-24 and not in education, employment or training.' (p.1). Young people who are NEET are viewed by many as a financial burden on society (Arnold and Baker 2013). In addition, the outcomes for those who become NEET are

poor, with research highlighting increased rates of drug use, poor mental and physical health and higher rates of youth offending. In order to address the growing number of NEETS in the UK the Government introduced policy to raise compulsory school leaving age. From 2015 young people must now stay in compulsory learning until they reach their 18th birthday (Education and Skills Act 2008).

It has been evidenced that there is a greater risk of becoming NEET for young people with special educational needs (Coles et al. 2010). Some of the risk factors found to be associated with becoming NEET could be considered particularly high amongst those under the SEN category of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). For example, the Longitudinal study of young people in England (LSYPE, 2010) highlighted the following characteristics of NEETs; having fewer than five GCSE's grade A-C, being eligible for free school meals and being excluded or suspended from school. In addition, poor mental health increases the probability of being NEET by 2.7 % for girls and 3.3% for boys after detailed controls are added (Centre for the Economics of Education, 2012).

At a national level the most recent statistics show that 826,000 young people aged 16-24 were NEET in the fourth quarter of 2016. The authority in which this research has taken place has a higher number of NEETs compared to the national average (24% compared to 17%) (JSNA, 2015). Local data from the Joint Strategic Needs assessment (2015) highlights that areas with high levels of childhood poverty and low levels of educational attainment have the highest numbers of young people who

are NEET. Thus there is a push towards raising educational attainment within this local authority, which provides part of the rationale for this research.

2.6 Social emotional and mental health difficulties

There has been much contention and debate over the terminology used to describe children and young people with social and emotional difficulties. Some terms used in the literature to refer to these difficulties are; emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), behavioural social and emotional difficulties (BESD) and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), often depending on which aspect of the term is deemed more important. The current term used in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2015) is social emotional and mental health (SEMH). The introduction of this term demonstrates progression in our understanding of these difficulties through acknowledging that some of the characteristics associated with SEMH may reflect underlying mental health difficulties. For the purposes of this work I will use the term SEMH unless referring to particular studies, where I will use the terminology used by the researcher.

Cole and Knowles (2011) projected that approximately 3-6% of children and young people in England could be defined as having SEBD. However, they suggested that this figure might be even higher if it includes young people with mental health difficulties and internalising behaviours. As previously stated the current definition in the Code of Practice has changed in order to incorporate the latter. Thus characteristics highlighted in the Code of Practice are:

‘becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder’ (section 6.32, p.98).

In addition, the literature recognises the influence of cultural factors on these young people, such as coming from socially and economically disadvantaged families (Farrell and Polat 2003). This complex interplay of factors can lead to a poor life trajectory.

There is a wealth of research focussing on the outcomes of young people with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, which consistently paints a worrying picture encompassing low levels of education, high rates of unemployment and increased risk for involvement in crime (Wood and Cronin 1999). The detrimental impact of these outcomes for young people and society may be why it remains such a prominent topic in the literature.

2.7 SEMH and educational context

In the UK, many pupils with SEMH leave school with few or no qualifications and low aspirations (Casey et al. 2006; Farrell, Critchley and Mills, 1999). Anderson, Kutash and Duchnowski (2001) found that children with SEMH difficulties tend to make less academic progress compared to peers without special educational needs and peers identified with learning difficulties. Furthermore, they show significant difficulty in

developing positive peer interactions and relationships (Lynn et al. 2013).

Indeed, the educational experiences of these young people and educator perceptions of them are often negative. 'Children with SEBD are often the least empowered and liked group of students' (Cefai and Cooper, 2009, p.39). A review of the literature focussing on educator perceptions of young people with SEBD found that staff who had greater professional experience of working with young people with these difficulties, were more likely to hold negative views than staff who had not had such direct experience (Armstrong, 2014). The views that educators hold are likely to influence how inclusive professional practice will be.

There has been debate over the years as to how this difficulty should be conceptualised, for example through the terminology used (Macleod, 2010) and also how the needs of these young people should be met. The election of the Labour Government in 1997 saw a move towards a whole school approach in supporting social and emotional wellbeing with the introduction of agendas such as 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003) and the 'social and emotional aspects of learning' programme (DfES, 2007). However, with the Conservative and Liberal Coalition in 2010 there was a 'stark change in government philosophy' (Cole, 2015, p32) with the DfE promoting the notion that 'problem' behaviour should be managed with discipline (DfE, 2010). This insular approach to managing SEMH served to reinforce the negative connotations associated with this area of need and increase the exclusion of this group. As Jull (2008) has previously highlighted, SEMH is the only category of SEN where punitive approaches such as school exclusion are viewed as acceptable.

This view is reflected in the statistics reported on special educational needs. A report published by the DfE in 2016 highlighted that in 2013/14 pupils at school action plus or with a statement of SEN with a primary need of BESD were more likely to be excluded from school. Just over 54% of pupils in this category received fixed term exclusion and they were the most likely to be permanently excluded. Consequently, the perceptions that these young people hold about education are likely to be negative. A review by Cefai and Cooper (2009) found that young people felt that they had been 'let down by a system that labelled them as deviant and failures, putting them even more at risk for social exclusion as young adults (p.49).

With the introduction of the Government Green paper, Support and Aspiration (DfE, 2012) and the presiding SEND Code of Practice (2015) the definition of SEBD changed to incorporate the term 'mental health' and thus recognises that externalising behaviour may allude to underlying mental health needs. However, Norwich and Eaton (2015) argue that the ambiguity and diverse use of the previously used term of BESD pervades with this new definition and removing the term 'behaviour' does not mean that this won't be taken into account. In addition the new Code of Practice emphasises the need for a person centred approach to SEN, greater choice and control over support and collaboration between professional services.

As of yet it is hard to evaluate the impact, if any, of making these changes. The most recent exclusion figures provided by the DfE for 2014/15 show the same prevailing trend of those with SEMH receiving the highest number of fixed term and permanent exclusion, as presented in the table below.

**Table 2.2 Permanent and fixed term exclusions data for 2014/15 by primary need
(DfE 2016)**

| Primary need | Number of pupils | Permanent exclusions | Fixed period exclusions |
|--|------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Specific learning difficulty | 135,500 | 1600 | 10,310 |
| Moderate learning difficulty | 241,130 | 3200 | 20,190 |
| Severe learning difficulty | 32,090 | 100 | 860 |
| Profound & multiple learning difficulty | 10,910 | x | 70 |
| Social, emotional and mental health | 169,110 | 1,3000 | 69,140 |
| Speech, language and communications needs | 190,480 | 1000 | 7,670 |
| Hearing impairment | 19,350 | 100 | 820 |
| Visual impairment | 10,840 | 100 | 550 |
| Multi- sensory impairment | 1,850 | 0 | 60 |
| Physical disability | 30,790 | 100 | 750 |
| Autistic spectrum disorder | 90,780 | 1100 | 7,250 |
| Other difficulty/disability | 50,210 | 700 | 4,780 |

It is unsurprising why young people experiencing these difficulties may become disillusioned and disengaged with the concept of education. In a review of the literature of post school outcomes for young people with EBD, Wood and Cronin (1999) found that students in this category tended to drop out of school earlier than other disability groups. More recently, Brown (2016) identified that for young people who have fewer than 3 months post-16 education, they are 2.3 times more likely to become NEET for 6 months or more thus perpetuating the negative cycle of social exclusion and placing these young people on a disparaging life trajectory. This highlights the importance of focusing on transition from secondary school into post-16 education.

2.8 SEMH and post-16

In terms of post-16 learning, there is a range of options that young people can choose following secondary school education. Due to the diversity of courses that are offered in FE college environments, it may be those populations that are considered more vulnerable, such as those with SEND, that are more likely to transition to further education. Sixth form provision tends to focus on more academic subjects and A Levels, which may not be suited to some young people with additional needs. Recent Government plans for post-16 skills recognises that a significant proportion of young people with SEND may not be able to access certain post-16 routes due to low prior attainment (DfE, 2016). Those with SEMH often have associated learning difficulties and leave school with few or no qualifications (Casey et al. 2006; Farrell, Critchley and Mills, 1999).

The move from mainstream education into further education is a significant event likely to have a strong influence on a young person's life. As previously discussed, in viewing transition through a sociocultural lens, it is clear that it encompasses more than a physical move from one setting to another. It involves processes of change in identity, learning and sense making (Zittoun, 2006) and social participation in a new community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Indeed, the transition out of school has been considered as a time of adversity for those with SEMH (O'Riordan, 2015).

As Davis and Vander Stoep (1997) highlight, in addition to cognitive delays, emerging adults with EBD may also have poor social problem solving skills, immaturity, less social attachment and increased conflicts with friends. Given these circumstances it

could be argued that the process of transition is even more complicated for young people with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Consequently, they have been found to be at higher risk of dropping out of further education courses (Jahnukainen, 2001). Arguably, Educational Psychologists are in a unique position to offer support in this area.

2.9 EPs in transition

With the introduction of new policy and legislation, the Childrens and Families Act (2014) extended statutory protections for young people with SEND until the age of 25 and the previous system of Statements was replaced with Education Health and Care Plans. With this, the role of EPs has extended to working in post-16 settings with young adults. Although the role of EPs previously encompassed work with 0-19 year olds, it seems that little work has been undertaken in this area, specifically in relation to the transition into post-16 settings.

In a review focussing on post school psychological services in Scotland, Mackay (2009) highlighted that when it comes to the transition process from secondary school to post-16 education, the involvement and understanding of EPs is poor. He concluded that post-16 EP services do not exist outside of Scotland. Yet the role that EPs can have in supporting further education provision has been discussed historically. A report by Mitchell (1997) mapped the services that EPs can offer to further education colleges. This includes planning for transition and stated that 'EPs have special skills in assessing student requirements and in ensuring effective transition from school into FE and beyond' (p.19).

Part of the reason for limited work in post-16 settings may be due to organisational issues such as funding and service level agreements. Thus, whilst this change in legislation represents new challenges to the profession, it also offers exciting opportunity for EPs to develop their work in this area. Hayton (2009) suggests that EP skills may be particularly relevant in the process of transition in terms of working collaboratively with schools and other services in addition to supporting young people themselves to develop the personal skills and tools needed to navigate this complex process.

In her thesis exploring professional's views of EPs contribution in FE within a Local Authority in the West Midlands, Clark (2014) found that students with SEBD were identified as having significant difficulties in succeeding at college. She concluded that further exploration is needed to see if this group would benefit from the support of EPs in FE.

Given the poor outcomes identified for young people with SEMH and the complex nature of transition, I feel this is an important area to research. Through supporting young people in the transition from school to further education we can foster resilience rather than create further vulnerability. As Rutter (1987) points out, resilience is something that can be created through an increase of protective factors and engaging in further education has been found to be an important protective factor for these young people (Youth Justice Board, 2005).

2.10 Previous research on transition and SEMH

2.10.1 Data Sources and Search Strategy

In order to explore existing and relevant literature that relate to this area of study, a detailed systematic search was employed using the University of Birmingham elibrary service. Searches were conducted using a range of databases including PsycInfo, ERIC and EBSCO Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

Preference was given to sources 15 years old or less as it was felt that this would capture the most relevant research. Whilst I acknowledge that education systems outside of the UK are likely to function differently to our own, it was decided to include sources from other countries to offer a range of research and perspectives.

Several search terms were trialled in order to bring up the relevant research. The final search terms used were (SEBD or EBD or SEMH or BESD) AND (mainstream school or further education or college or post 16*(*indicates truncation) AND (transition or transfer). Abstracts of the articles were read and excluded or included based on specific criteria to ensure relevance to the research. References and citations from these articles were also followed up on and included if relevant. In addition related information was sought from Government policies and guidance and some third sector bodies and websites.

2.10.2 Transition of young people with SEN

As already discussed throughout prior sections, the post-16 outcomes for young people with SEN can be poor and they have a greater risk of becoming NEET (Coles

et al. 2010). Research has highlighted a particularly negative picture for young people under the SEN category, SEMH. A large scale longitudinal study exploring the post-16 experiences of young people with SEN found that young people categorised as BESD were the least likely to have gained qualifications in school and at three year follow up were most likely to be in employment or training rather than education (Dewson et al. 2004; Aston et al. 2005). In addition, young people with BESD without a statement in mainstream education could not recall attending a transition planning meeting, which may suggest that the transition needs of this group were not met. However, interviews with these young people took place three years after completing compulsory education, so some accounts may have been impacted by recall bias.

Dewson et al. (2004) concluded that it was a complex interplay of factors that determined an individual's trajectory. They note that post-16 transitions are not as clear as they used to be and constitute times of particular vulnerability for many young people (Aston et al. 2005). It was suggested that those with social and emotional difficulties and/or social disadvantage might have few resources of their own to draw on to manage this period of transition. As noted previously, the associated difficulties of young people with SEMH such as poor problem solving skills and less social attachments (Davis and Vander Stoep, 1997), may make transition even more complicated.

Tyson (2011) also explored the transition experiences of four young people with additional needs from mainstream school into further education including one young

person with a statement for BESD. Her findings did not reflect the same concerns raised by Dewson et al. (2004) though as she notes, the focus of her research was not on the specific nature of the young people's needs so may not have been sensitive enough to highlight these differences. What her research did highlight was a gap in the literature exploring transition support for those with additional needs in mainstream settings, as the majority of previous research has focussed on the transition from specialist provision. Her research helped to address this gap and highlighted an unclear pathway in the transition of learners with additional needs from mainstream school into further education. This suggests that this area would benefit from further exploration.

2.10.3 Education Provision

Recent statistics highlight that in the UK there are more pupils with a primary need of SEMH on SEN support than with an Education, Health and Care Plan (DfE, 2016). This suggests that the majority of pupils with SEMH are likely to be educated in mainstream provision. Previous research has highlighted that young people with SEMH in the UK who have previously attended specialist residential provision, felt that their school experience had been positive (Bray, 2010; Farrell and Polat 2003). In contrast, the experiences of pupils with SEMH in mainstream provision have been found to be negative. Bray (2010) found that pupils with BESD felt that they had been treated negatively by mainstream staff, they had not been listened to and they were denied access to the curriculum and mainstream activities. Negative school experiences may impact on later outcomes and increase the risk of further social exclusion for these young people (Cefai and Cooper 2009).

However Jahnukainen (2001) concludes, from his research following up former pupils that had attended special classes in mainstream school, that it is background rather than placement that influences the outcomes for pupils with EBD. Indeed it has been argued that the focus on negative experiences in mainstream provision versus positive experiences in special provision is too simplistic (Sellman et al. 2002). Yet, invariably there will be differences between schools in the way that they define, acknowledge and respond to SEMH (Daniels et al. 1998). As highlighted through Zittoun's (2006) symbolic transitions framework, the social frame in which transition takes place is important in facilitating or constraining the processes of transition. The negative experiences young people have in mainstream provision may reflect a need for the social frame to better adapt to the needs of learners with SEMH. Indeed, research exploring staff views has acknowledged a difficulty in this area.

2.10.4 Staff Knowledge

In a study following up ex students of a specialist residential provision in New Zealand, researchers highlighted that the skill level of mainstream teachers in managing students with EBD was a key aspect of successful transition (Hornby and Witte, 2008). However, research eliciting the views of staff members in mainstream provision highlights a lack of knowledge in how to manage young people with SEMH. In a thesis exploring professional views of how to support Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LLDDs) in further education, Clark (2014) highlighted a particularly bleak picture for young people with SEMH. It was reported that none of the students in the past 5 years that transitioned to college from the local SEBD

school had completed their courses. Interviews with staff highlighted a difficulty for them in meeting the needs of learners with SEBD.

In addition to a lack of knowledge on how to meet needs, some research has highlighted negative perceptions of learners with SEMH. In exploring the supports in place for learners with SEBD, O'Sullivan (2011) highlighted an inequality within college culture whereby staff in college pertained to the view that when in further education young people should conform to the rules and regulations of the adult world. Some staff felt that dealing with challenging behaviour and offering pastoral support was out of their remit. This may have evidenced itself in practice as none of the five young people interviewed in this research could identify staff that they believed understood their needs. As Landrum, Tankersley and Kaufmann (2003) note, many teachers are inadequately trained to effectively manage the kind of challenges that this group of young people are likely to present.

This was also reflected in O'Riordan's (2011) study exploring the experiences of school leavers with SEBD. At the time of this research, the compulsory school leaving age was 16. This meant that there was no obligation for young people to attend post-16 education and this notion seemed to be mirrored in the narratives of staff. For example, some staff were of the opinion that as post-16 education was not compulsory, students need to be self-motivated and if they did not want to complete the course then they should leave the setting. This is likely to be compounded by the expectations of education settings needing to achieve certain educational targets (O'Sullivan, 2011).

In one case described in the research, a young person's needs had not been passed from school to college, resulting in him not receiving the appropriate support. This had negatively impacted on his college experience and only came to light when a meeting was held about his behaviour. When questioned, staff reported that students needed to prove that they had ADHD as they were 'dubious' as to whether they all had diagnoses. In considering the college as a community of practice this suggests that the community may not be facilitating social participation by acknowledging and adapting to the inclusion of new members with these needs. It is perhaps these negative points of view that may contribute to young people not wanting to disclose their difficulties to new settings.

2.10.5 Stigma

The negative connotations associated with having social, emotional and mental health difficulties are widely acknowledged. These young people are often referred to as the most challenging category of SEN to teach (Armstrong, 2014). Given some of the opinions expressed, it is unsurprising that some research has found reluctance for young people to disclose their needs to new settings. In a study exploring the transition experiences of emerging adults with EBD in higher education, two of the five participants chose not to disclose their diagnosis to the setting as they did not want to feel 'pitied' or like they were using it as an excuse (Fowler, 2008). It is important to note that this research took place in America, where EBD stands for Emotional and Behaviour *Disorders*, which may have different connotations.

In addition, some young people feel that even when their needs are disclosed to new settings, some members of staff do not care. Young people interviewed by O'Sullivan (2011) reported that teachers failed to understand their needs or have high expectations of them in college. As noted above, O'Riordan (2011) found in her research that staff were suspicious about some learners who had disclosed that they had additional needs. In addition, interviews with the young people in Dewson et al. (2004) study highlighted that whilst the majority of young people with SEN felt that their post-16 options had worked out well, those with BESD were more likely to report higher levels of dissatisfaction with the formal support they had received.

2.10.6 Relationships

As noted by O'Riordan (2015) the shift in identity that comes with transition may be particularly difficult for those with SEMH. What seems to support this shift is developing supportive relationships. O'Riordan (2015) suggests that by having their identity verified, young people will experience positive emotions that help them adjust to 'identity challenging situations' (p.419). Using interviews with the young people themselves, teaching staff and connexions workers, O'Riordan (2011) conducted an in depth longitudinal examination of the transition process for school leavers from a range of settings with SEBD. Through analysis she concluded that there was much more to a successful transition than the school that the young person attended. What seemed to be key for all of the young people were the relationships with staff that they had experienced.

Most of the young people taking part in this research went on to do vocational courses in further education. Discussion of specific cases highlighted that those who were successful in their placements, had built positive relationships with their tutors. For example, one young person attributed his entire success on the course to the support he had received from his tutor. This member of staff committed extra time to ensuring that the young person felt secure and valued. O’Riordan (2011) suggests that the young people in this study were more motivated by approval and achievement from those who supported them, rather than the qualification they were working towards.

This view was also found by Attwood, Croll and Hamilton (2004). They conducted a case study of a further education college that ran a programme to admit ‘disaffected’ young people who were in year 10 and 11 onto a range of vocational courses. Over half of the students had been excluded from school or were persistent non-attenders. In line with previous findings, the aspect of college that was liked best by the young people was the relationship that they developed with their college tutor. Some terms used were ‘makes you feel welcome’ ‘more grown up’ and ‘being treated with respect’. The young people preferred the different pedagogic approaches taken in college as they felt that the teaching style in school did not suit them. These relationships may have fostered a sense of belonging for the young people, which has been suggested to be key in successful transition (Wenger, 1998).

Interviews with college staff and the young people in this research also identified that young people were more motivated on vocational courses as they could see the

relevance to future employment. Through a sociocultural lens, it could be said that the new object of activity made sense to them thus facilitating transition. Yet, despite the 'overwhelmingly positive' feedback given, by the end of the academic year only 56% of participants in this programme were still attending their courses. Although a detailed statistical analysis of factors contributing to completion rates were not given, young people who had been disengaged from school and persistent non-attenders had lower than average completion rates. This suggests that disengagement with education may have long-term impact on motivation towards post-16 study.

Bounds (2012) found a significant difference in completion rates of post secondary education for those with EBD who received support compared to those who did not. In addition, the self-determination skills of young people were highlighted as particularly significant in successful transition. Those who had used self-determination skills and taken part in their own transition planning had higher completion rates than those who did not. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) highlight that a sense of relatedness to the education setting is needed in order to foster self-determination skills. Thus, having supportive relationships may foster a sense of belonging, which in turn may support challenges to identity as suggested by O'Riordan (2015). Actively engaging students in the transition plan was also identified as helpful in O'Sullivan's (2011) research.

In taking a more strengths based approach, O'Sullivan (2011) explored the systems of support in place for male pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

(SEBD) to remain in post-16 education. This research took place following the changing political context resulting in cuts to the Education Maintenance Allowance (a financial scheme put in place to support those aged 16-19 from low income families), thus reducing the financial incentive for young people to stay in post-16 education.

The study was split into two parts. The first part sought to explore young people's views on what supported them to remain in post-16 education through using the process of co-operative enquiry. Key themes that emerged reinforce previous findings that young people thought that there was a lack of formal support in place after leaving school and they felt disconnected from the new and unfamiliar environment in post-16. As in O'Riordan's (2011) research, it was relationships that provided motivation for the young people to continue participating in post-16 education, in particular the support of a learning mentor. However, when this person was not available, young people were unable to draw on a wider system of support and felt that other members of staff did not understand their needs. It was felt that this was a significant factor, which contributed to drop out.

The second part of the research focussed on exploring the views of the practitioners that work with the young people. Most participants referred to the importance of cultivating caring relationships, however in contrast to other post-16 environments, staff from the FE college emphasised the need for young people to conform to the rules, which consequently impacted on young people's sense of belonging. Staff in the study also noted constraints in that there was lack of formal transition plan for

these young people in addition to a lack of funding and resources, partly due to Statements ceasing at the age of 16 at that point in time. Three out of the five participants in this study were NEET before reaching the end of their second year in employment, education or training.

2.10.7 Conclusion

As highlighted above, previous research has provided us with a snapshot of the difficulties young people experience in education through the eyes of staff and young people themselves. Key themes arising in the literature focus on stigma, changes in identity and the importance of relationships and support received. As Tellis-James and Fox (2016) note, gathering the views of young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties can help to illuminate the problems experienced by this group and support resolution. Unfortunately due to reasons discussed in later sections of this research, the young person's voice could not be gathered in this case.

The research presented shows a complex picture of transition for young people with SEMH. The issues highlighted seem to be entrenched within a myriad of social and cultural factors within the education context. Whilst previous research alludes to some of the factors involved in successful transition to further education, there may be an 'excessive concentration on the role of personal characteristics of young people and the strengths and weaknesses of individual courses' (Attwood, Croll and Hamilton, 2004, p.117). Thus, there appears to be a gap in the literature exploring the relationship between these differing factors focussing on the wider context of

the institutions themselves. As previously discussed, the institution is the social frame, which will ultimately support or constrain the transition process (Zittoun 2006). It is the role of the education setting to construct new tools, artifacts and practices so that young people can transition successfully.

Therefore, further exploration is needed to clearly identify these issues through examining the activity of transition through a sociocultural lens. In light of this, my research will focus on exploring professional views on the activity of transition from mainstream school into further education and why this population of young people with SEMH are still at high risk of becoming NEET. In addition, I will explore the role of EPs in this process as the question of whether this group would benefit from the support of EPs in FE has been identified as an area for future research (Clark, 2014).

2.11 Research Questions

The following research questions were identified through exploring the literature.

- 1) What supports the transition of young people with SEMH into further education?
- 2) What constrains the transition of young people with SEMH into further education?
- 3) What is the role of the EP, if any, in the transition process?
- 4) How are secondary schools and FE colleges working together in the transition process?

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by outlining my philosophical views and beliefs in terms of my epistemological position and how activity theory is situated within this. I will then go on to present an overview of activity theory and its origins, which will provide the rationale for this choice of methodology. Finally, the method for this research will be presented, describing data collection, analysis and ethical considerations. Critical reflections are highlighted throughout this chapter.

3.2 Rationale for research design and positioning the methodology

When considering choice of methodology and research design, it is important to reflect on our own philosophical assumptions about the world. As practitioners of social science, we are driven to understand the nature of being and how we go about researching this will vary depending on our own worldview. The purpose of my research is to find out what is happening in the process of transition. To explore this, I could take the view that transition is quantifiable and measureable, aligning myself within a positivist paradigm. However, as highlighted through the literature review, the phenomenon of transition is complex and constructed in a myriad of ways, which is not amenable to quantification.

An alternative view would be to see transition as socially constructed. Yet this would mean ignoring real, external factors such as the social frame of the school and as highlighted in section 2.10, these factors exert an important influence on the process. Instead, I align myself with a critical realist perspective. Critical realism is an

approach that allows for an understanding that the world exists independently of our thinking about it (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2010), yet it is subject to our own subjective interpretation. It also recognises that this interpretation may be fallible so it is not possible to perceive the real world in its true form (Guba, 1990 as cited in Robson, 2002). Therefore, this perspective is critical of our ability to know reality with certainty.

There are several methodologies that could be considered within the critical realist paradigm, therefore it is important to refer back to the purpose of my research. Children's transitions are usually defined in terms of the immediate contexts and practices that shape their lives. However, as noted in the literature review, to understand the process of transition for the individual, attention also needs to be paid to the effect of socio-cultural factors such as policy, environment, structure, and the interaction between all of these levels. In order to analyse the complexities of transition, a method is needed which can transcend a single level of analysis.

Systemic approaches recognise that children's experiences of transition are embedded in wider social structures and processes (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008). Some of the literature already presented in the previous chapter has drawn on theories such as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (2001) as an approach to exploring transition (O'Sullivan, 2011; Tyson, 2011; O'Riordan, 2015). Whilst this approach provides a detailed analysis of the interconnections within the systems around the child, less attention is paid to historical influences and how the activity of transition came to be this way.

Activity theory presents a useful framework in which to represent the individual as embedded within the cultural-historical practice of social institutions (Sellman et al. 2002). It also provides an analytic tool for understanding complex learning situations such as transition. An emphasis is placed on knowledge developing through a process of internalising aspects of the activity system, then externalising new ways of practice. Individuals are not just passive participants, waiting for the environment to make meaning. An individual cannot be understood without cultural means, and society cannot be understood without the agency of individuals (Engeström, 2001).

Activity theory has been criticised for not having clearly defined research methods and procedures (Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008). Furthermore, there are multiple perspectives within activity theory that may make it challenging to position within one epistemological view. Whilst some research has situated activity theory within a social constructionist paradigm (Durbin, 2009; Leadbetter, 2002), Soan (2012) reasons that 'the absence of a material world, as espoused by some social constructionists, does not fit well with the underlying influences of Marx and Leont'ev on the development of the theory, especially in terms of interaction between the internal and external world' (p.100). She suggests that the relationship between activity and thought in activity theory better lends itself to critical realism. This view is further supported by Wheelahan (2007) who argues that critical realism and activity theory are complementary theories that 'include both the development of the individual as a reflexive being with self-understanding and an understanding of the activity system that they work within' (p.194-195).

Relating to this my own research, a critical realist position and the use of activity theory will allow me to explore the social, historical and collective nature of the transition process through multiple perspectives. This exploration will highlight contradictions within the activity system that may then lead to future development. The idea of the fallibility of human nature in critical realism fits well with Engeström's notions of contradictions within an activity system, which is described in more detail below. As Bhaskar highlights, if false understandings, and actions based on them, can be identified, this provides an impetus for change (Bhaskar, 1986, cited in Robson 2002).

3.3 Activity Theory

3.3.1 Theoretical origins

Activity theory has developed from the work of cultural psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978). As already discussed in section 2.3 Vygotsky's work has underpinned several sociocultural frameworks used to consider transitions, namely consequential transitions (Beach, 1999), symbolic transitions and identity rupture (Zittoun, 2006) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). In contrast to other disciplines at the time, Vygotsky emphasised the importance of culture on development and the social contexts in which learning takes place. He suggested that tools, signs and interactions with the social world mediate human action. Mediation is a central tenet in Vygotsky's conceptualisation of learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky's ideas have been expanded by many other theorists such as his students Luria and Leont'ev and more recently Yrjö Engeström, who is a key writer and

researcher in the area of activity theory (Leadbetter, 2008). Indeed, activity theory has been criticised for not being a unified theory with multiple definitions and perspectives in the literature (Holzman, 2006). It is beyond the scope of this research to explore and debate all of these, however it is important to clarify the ideas from which I am drawing. The focus of this research will therefore be on activity theory as a tool for studying activity as interpreted by Engeström (1987).

3.3.2 Generations of activity theory

Engeström has represented activity theory as falling into three generations. The ideas proposed by Vygotsky provided the first conceptualisation of human activity within a simple diagrammatic triangle, linking the subject and the object through means of mediation. The object is the focus of activity and provides rationale and motivation for why people act the way that they do. Vygotsky's model has been termed as first generation activity theory as shown in the figure below.

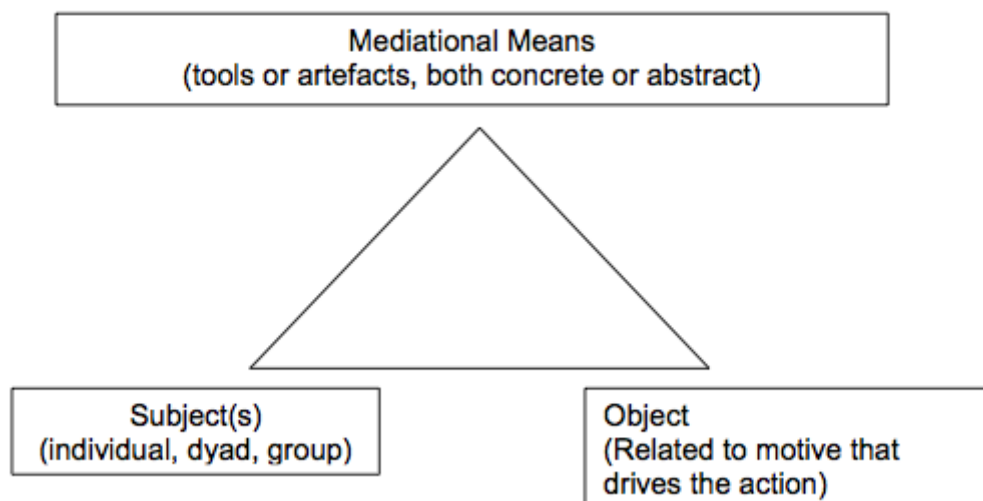


Figure 3.1 First generation activity theory model (taken from Daniels, 2001a)

Leont'ev (1981) recognised that motive is the driving force of activity and this is a product of collective rather than individual efforts. Engeström (1999a) built on this further and argued that Vygotsky's work does not fully explain the societal and collaborative nature of action and that the focus of mediation should be on its relationship with other components in the activity system. This led Engeström to extend the activity system to incorporate the collective nature of activity, including the notion of rules, community and division of labour (Engeström, 1987). The rules are conditions that support or constrain the object of activity, division of labour relates to the distribution of actions and the community is who is involved in the activity. This is known as second generation activity theory as depicted in the figure below.

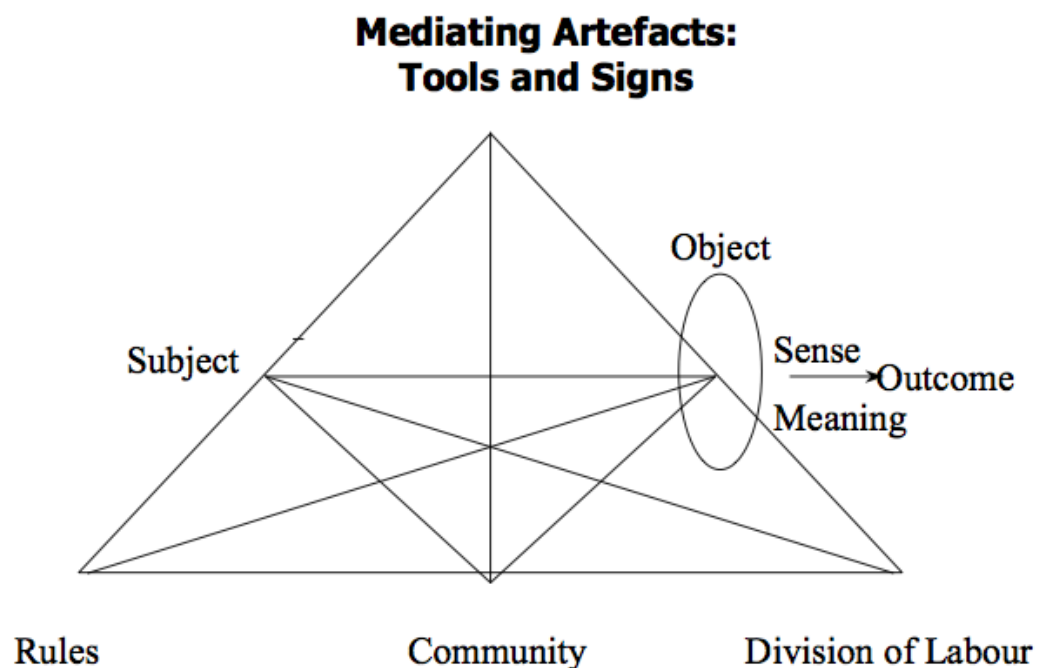


Figure 3.2 Second generation activity theory model (Engeström, 1987, in Leadbetter, 2002)

As well as acknowledging these contextual factors, Engeström also emphasises the importance of historicity as a guiding principle in the analysis of human action, which was a central tenet in the development of Vygotsky's theory. As Daniels and Cole (2002) point out, there needs to be an understanding of the way that systems have come into being how they are at present. This expansion of Vygotsky's original triangular representation moves analysis of activity from a micro level analysis to a macro level. Thus, whilst activity theory and sociocultural approaches share common elements, activity theory is distinct in its practice (Leadbetter, 2008).

Engeström (1999b) has further expanded his work to acknowledge that activity systems do not exist in isolation but are alongside and interacting with other activity systems in the community. This highlights the multi-voicedness and many points of views that exist within systems (Daniels, 2008). These systems may have competing objects but through exploring contradictions, new objects can be developed through the process of expansive learning. This is known as third generation activity shown in the figure below.

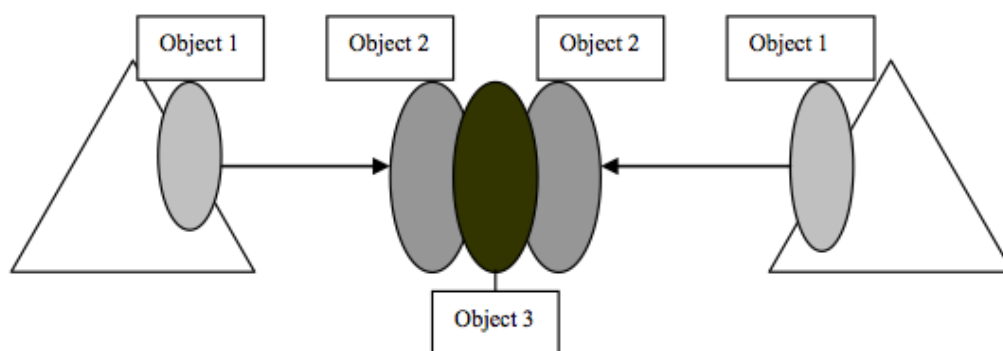


Figure 3.3 Third generation activity theory model (Engeström, 1999b)

3.3.3 Key concepts in activity theory

In order to clarify some of the complexities of activity theory, Engeström has proposed five principles, which are summarised in Daniels (2001a) and presented by Leadbetter (2008, p.201-202) as follows:

Table 3.1 Five key principles of activity theory

| |
|--|
| The prime unit of analysis in activity theory is 'a collective artefact-mediated and object-oriented activity system, seen in its network relations to other activity systems' (Daniels 2001, p.93). |
| Activity systems are multi-voiced as there are always a community of multiple viewpoints with differing interest and traditions. |
| The historicity of activity systems is extremely important in that they develop over long periods of time and are constantly transformed and transforming. Through investigating the historical aspects (formation) of systems, new understandings can be brought to bear on current activity systems. |
| Contradictions are central to an understanding of activity theory as they are sources of tension, disturbance and eventually change development. By examining contradictions within and between activity systems new objects can be created and new ways of working can be developed. |
| Finally the transformative nature of activity systems is emphasised as Engeström maintains that through examination of contradictions participants may question established patterns of working and new motives and new objects may be formed. These transformations may occur over lengthy periods of time and result in a much wider range of possibilities for action. Daniels suggests that these five principles act as a manifesto of the current state of activity theory (2001, p.93). |

The first three principles have already been discussed. I will now turn my attention to discuss the final two points as it is through these points; I hope my research will contribute to change.

3.3.4 Contradictions

Leadbetter (2008) proposes three ways in which activity theory can be applied to the work of EPs. Through using it as a descriptive framework, an analytic device and as an organisational development approach. In the present research, I am using second generation activity theory as an analytic device, with a view that the findings may contribute to organisational change in the future.

Contradictions in activity theory, as described above, are areas of tension within and between activity systems. They are important not in and of themselves but because it is through highlighting these contradictions that activity systems can learn and evolve. In essence, contradictions are the driving force behind development (Durbin, 2009). Engeström proposes four different levels of contradiction which are presented in the table below, as shown in Soan (2012, p.92) adapted from <http://www.edu.helsinki.fi/activity/pages/chatanddwr/activitysystem/> accessed 11/11/10.

Table 3.2 Levels of contradictions

| | |
|---|--|
| Level one: Primary inner contradictions | These contradictions exist within the component parts of the activity system, for example within the rules |
| Level two: Secondary contradictions | These contradictions exist between the |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| | constituents of the central activity, for example between the object and the tools (artefacts) |
| Level three: Tertiary contradictions | These contradictions exist between the object/motive of the dominant form of the central activity and the object/motive of the more advanced form |
| Level four: Quaternary contradictions | These contradictions exist between the central activity and its neighbouring activities |

The identification of contradictions can lead to a process referred to as expansive learning. The figure below shows the seven stages of the expansive learning cycle as proposed by Engeström (1999).

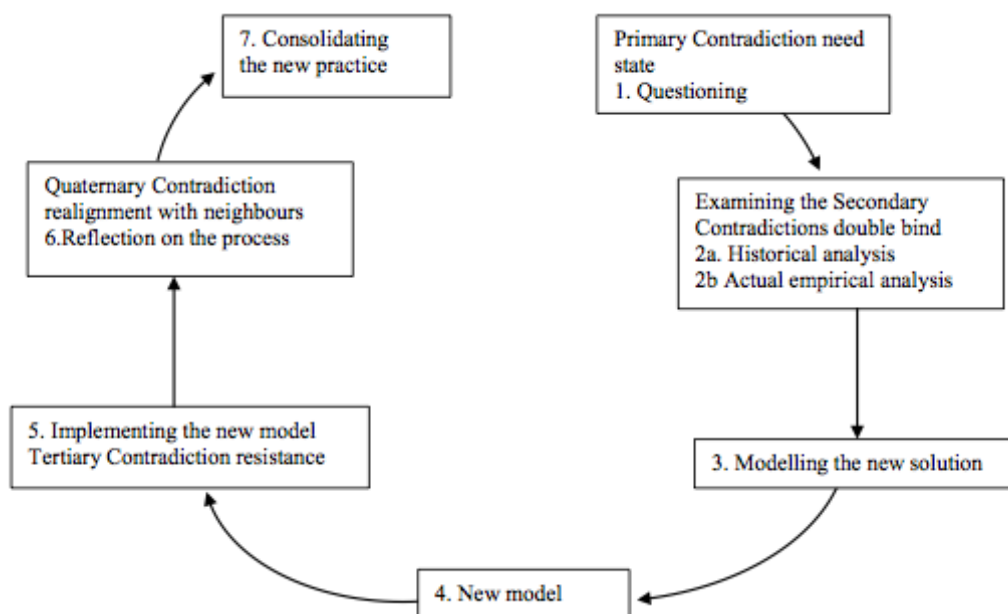


Figure 3.4 Cycle of expansive learning (Engeström, 1999b)

Expansive learning relates to the notions of internalisation and externalisation briefly mentioned in section 3.2, through cycles of development. 'As the disruptions and contradictions of the activity become more demanding, internalisation increasingly takes the form of critical self-reflection – and externalisation, a search for solutions increases. Externalisation reaches its peak when a new model for the activity is designed and implemented.' (Engeström, 1999b, p.33-34). The different levels of contradiction relate to different stages of the cycle. For example, primary contradictions trigger stages of questioning and secondary contradictions provoke analysing actions (Foot, 2014).

3.3.5 Application of activity theory

Activity theory has been increasingly used within education as it acknowledges that learning is not a discrete skill but takes place through being a part of and making connections in the activity system (Wheelahan, 2007). In reference to my own area of research, activity theory has previously been used as a framework and methodology in exploring transition in education with a focus from primary school to secondary school (Atkinson, 2006). The use of activity theory helped to highlight differences in views of teachers and pupils and signpost ways to improve the practice in the future.

Activity theory has also been applied as an analytic framework in exploring education for young people with SEMH. Daniels and Cole (2002) used activity theory to provide a historical analysis of research and policy to explore the provision and pedagogic practices that have developed over time for this group of young people.

They contended that a historical analysis of the way education came to be this way, is a necessity in future change and outcomes for these young people. Both of these pieces of research highlight the effectiveness of using activity theory to analyse complex social practices. To my knowledge, activity theory has not been used to focus on the transition from secondary school to further education for young people with SEMH.

3.4 Summary of methodology

Through presenting a brief overview of Engeström's work on the development of activity theory, I have presented a rationale for my choice of methodology. It has been argued that activity theory focuses too much on the activity without taking into account the individual involved in activity at the time (Toomela, 2000). However, previous research has provided a picture of transition at the individual level. The focus for this piece of research is to explore the process of transition for young people with SEMH from the perspective of the different activity systems. Ultimately, it will be through identifying contradictions between these systems that will be integral in answering my research questions and promoting future development and practice. As Daniels (2001b) points out, 'change in patterns of individual behaviour and development may be best considered from the perspective of the activity rather than the lone individual' (p.119).

3.5 Method and data collection

3.5.1 Context

This research took place in a unitary authority in the East of England. Children in this city are statistically disadvantaged compared to the average for England (JSNA, 2015), which places them at risk of SEMH difficulties (Farrell and Polat, 2003). There are 13 secondary schools and two further education colleges.

3.5.2 Participants

Participants were identified to take part in this research through a process of purposive sampling described in section 3.5.3 below. Participants that are involved in the transition process for young people with SEMH were identified from three secondary schools, two further education settings and the EP service (EPS). 22 participants took part in total as shown in table 3.3 below.

3.5.3 Recruitment data collection and analysis

In order to recruit participants, a letter was sent to the Head teachers of mainstream schools and heads of Further Education (FE) settings within the local area outlining the purpose of the study and inviting them to take part in the research (see Appendix 2). Once consent had been gained, further information was sent to the school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) and equivalent role in FE (see Appendix 3). This person identified staff members who were involved in the transition process and asked if they were willing to take part in the research, gaining their written consent (see Appendix 4). Colleagues from the EPS were recruited via explanation of the project during a meeting with the service. Dates and times were

then arranged to complete individual interviews with participants. Interviews were partially transcribed omitting any personal information to protect confidentiality and anonymity (see Appendix 6 for example).

Secondary school SENCOs were also asked to identify young people in year 11 with SEMH that might like to take part in the research. It was hoped that interviews could take place with the young people at the end of year 11 and once they had made the transition to FE, so that their reality of the transition process could be explored. However, due to the timing of ethical approval, young people were already in the process of taking their final exams and could not be recruited. Whilst this is acknowledged as a limitation of the present study, information presented in the literature review illuminates child's voice in relation to this subject area. In addition the gap highlighted in the literature was knowledge of the wider contextual factors of the institutions themselves. The final participants are shown in the table below.

Table 3.3 Final participant groups and roles

| Secondary staff | Further education staff | Educational psychologists |
|---|---|--|
| SP1 - Work experience co-ordinator and destinations | CP1 – Pastoral | EP1 – Senior specialist educational psychologist for vulnerable young people EP2 – Maingrade educational psychologist EP3 – Maingrade educational psychologist EP4 – Senior educational |
| SP2 - SENCO | CP2 – Support worker | |
| SP3 – Assistant head teacher | CP3 – Pastoral | |
| SP4 – SENCO | CP4 – Additional learning support for mental health | |
| SP5 – Pastoral | CP5 – Additional learning support for SEBD | |
| SP6 – Higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) | CP6 – Support worker | |
| | CP7 – Programme area | |

| | | |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| SP7 – Deputy SENCO | leader | psychologist |
| SP8 – Assistant head teacher | CP8 – Lecturer | EP5 – Maingrade educational psychologist |
| | CP9 – Additional learning support team leader | |

3.5.4 Semi-structured interviews

Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews with questions based on the different areas of the activity triangle framework as shown in the figure below (see Appendix 5 for interview schedule). Semi-structured interviews allow for both structure and flexibility.

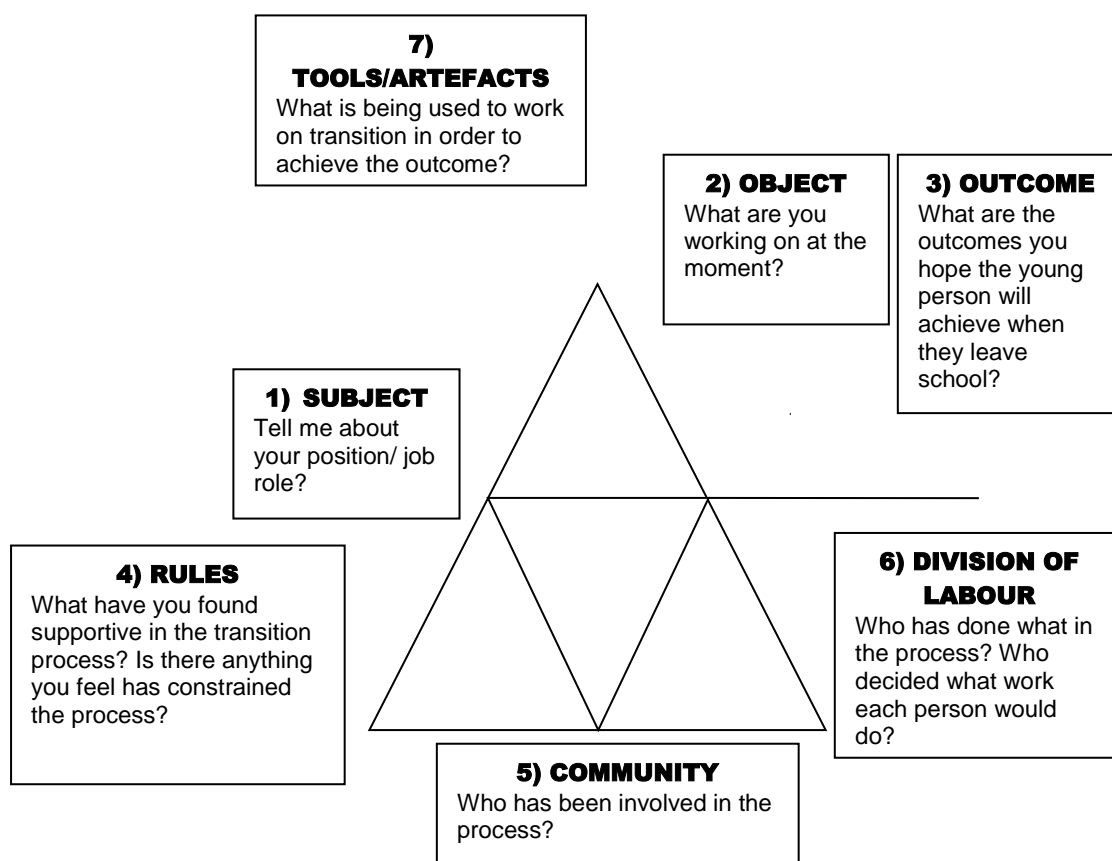


Figure 3.5 Semi-structured interview schedule

A brief explanation of activity theory was given to participants prior to commencing the interviews. A blank A3 diagram of an activity triangle was used with each participant, to support explanation and demonstrate how the interview questions would be structured. During the interview, written notes of participant responses were made on the diagram, around the relevant nodes of the activity triangle. Further information and direct quotes were later added to each participant's diagram through a process of repeated listening as described in section 3.7 below.

At the beginning of each interview, the participant was also asked what their understanding of the term SEMH was. This was done to ensure a shared understanding of the population group being discussed. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes.

This methodology supports my epistemological stance, which recognises that there will be multiple realities of the situation. The interviews were conducted one to one, as I wanted to gather rich data for analysis. Whilst it is acknowledged that semi-structured interviews allow for the co-construction of understanding, data that is collected in this way is also open to researcher bias. The limitations of this are discussed in section 3.8 below.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure the research was conducted within ethical guidelines, approval was sought from the University of Birmingham School of Education Ethics Committee through completion of the Application for Ethical Review (AER) form (see

Appendix 1). In addition, the research adhered to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) on issues regarding respect, confidentiality, and informed consent. This is highlighted in table 3.4 below.

Table 3.4 Ethical issues considered in the research and how they were addressed

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Informed consent | All participants were provided with material about the research (see Appendix 3) including information on issues of confidentiality, the right to withdraw and the nature of data collection and storage. Verbal and written consent was gained prior to the interviews being conducted (see Appendix 4). Participants were also asked if they would like to receive feedback on the outcomes of the research with a view to developing the transition process in the future. |
| Right to withdraw | Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any point before the interviews took place without any explanation. It was explained that withdrawal time after the interviews was limited to 4 weeks as after this time data analysis will have commenced and it would be difficult to remove data from the analysis. This was clarified via the information letter (see Appendix 3) in addition to a verbal reminder at the start of the interview. |
| Confidentiality and anonymity | To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, all responses and information were anonymised and kept securely. Individual data was treated as confidential to the participant and researcher and any identifying details were omitted in transcription and analysis. |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Data storage | Interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder and transferred to a secure portable memory stick. Supplementary notes were taken during the interview process and stored in a locked filing cabinet in accordance with guidelines from the Data Protection Act (1998). All electronic data was password protected. In line with University guidelines, data will be stored securely for 10 years following the research and then destroyed. |
| Reporting of research findings | Research findings will be reported in a written thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham. A summary of this report will also be shared with participants who requested feedback through their written consent. |

3.7 Method of analysis

The data were analysed as three separate activity systems, secondary school staff, FE staff and EPs. Whilst the activity being explored was the same (transition), the institutions that the participants were part of differed in structure so needed to be analysed within their own framework.

Although activity theory is itself a method of analysis, the data was also analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke 2006). It is a flexible approach as unlike other methods of analysis such as IPA or grounded theory, it is independent of any pre-existing paradigms (Braun and Clarke 2006). Although as (Durbin, 2009)

notes, any theoretical framework carries assumptions about the nature of the data, which it represents.

Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a step-by-step approach to guide the researcher through the process of thematic analysis. This is highlighted in the table below.

Table 3.5 The six phases of thematic analysis and steps taken in the research

| | |
|--|--|
| Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with your data | Initial notes were reviewed and added to through repeated listening and partial transcription of recorded interviews (see Appendix 6 for example) |
| Phase 2: Generating initial codes | Data was systematically coded for each individual within each activity system (see Appendix 7 for example) |
| Phase 3: Searching for themes | Codes were grouped together into potential themes (see Appendix 8 for example) |
| Phase 4: Reviewing themes | Initial themes were reviewed and grouped into thematic maps for each activity system (see figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3) |
| Phase 5: Defining and naming themes | Themes were refined and organised into a consistent account for all activity systems (see figure 4.4) Themes were then further refined to highlight superordinate themes (see appendix 9 for example) |
| Phase 6: Producing the report | See chapters 4, 5 and 6 |

During phase 1, it was decided not to use software such as NVivo to generate themes as I felt that it would distance me from my research. Therefore, researcher bias could be considered a limitation of this study. However, I have been transparent about the methodology and analysis as described in section 3.8 below and as Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight, 'researcher judgement is a necessary component to determine what a theme is' (p.10). In addition, due to the amount of data generated and the time taken for transcription, interviews were not transcribed in full.

Cohen et al (2011) suggests that an alternative to transcription is to write analysis of the data directly from the audio recording rather than from the mediated source of transcription so that the bigger picture is not lost. Therefore, the audio recording for each interview was repeatedly listened to, with written notes and direct quotes continuously added to, around the relevant nodes on the participant's diagram of the activity triangle (see appendix 6).

3.8 Methodological considerations

Robson (2002) points out that the constructs of validity and reliability will differ depending on the nature of the research. In qualitative research, these notions have often been conceptualised as trustworthiness and credibility (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Tracy (2010) has proposed an eight-point model of quality in qualitative research that can be used flexibly and universally across paradigms. Some of these points have been discussed elsewhere in this research, for example ethical implications (see section 3.6). The following methodological considerations were made in relation to three aspects of her model, namely credibility, resonance and sincerity.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of findings. To ensure credibility of the research, findings were discussed and shared with my supervisor at various stages of the study. The table below highlights the timeline and sustained engagement with this research.

Table 3.6 Overview of research activity and timeline

| Research Activity | Date completed |
|---|---------------------------|
| Application for ethical review submitted (see Appendix 1) | March 2016 |
| Full ethical approval granted following amendments | August 2016 |
| Initial contact with secondary schools, FE settings and EPs outlining research (see Appendix 2, 3 and 4) and consent gained | August 2016 |
| Data collection through semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 5 and 6) | September – October 2016 |
| Analysis of data (see Appendix 7 to 9 for example and written thesis) | November 2016 – June 2017 |

Thick description of data has been provided alongside a detailed outline of the research and methods at each juncture to allow for transparency. The data were triangulated through considering the findings alongside the ideas and explanations generated by other researchers as evidenced in the literature review. This adds further credibility to the research. In addition the link between data analysis and interpretation has been made explicit with examples of raw data and the subsequent stages of coding.

3.8.2 Resonance

Resonance refers to the extent that research can meaningfully affect an audience and includes the concept of transferability (Tracy, 2010). In qualitative research conducted with a critical realist epistemology, there is recognition that there are multiple perceptions about reality. Therefore, the extent to which this research affords external generalisation is contentious. However, key themes that arise from the research may be pertinent to similar settings involved in the transition of young people with SEMH. Therefore, thick description was provided to allow the reader to make choices based on their own understanding and judge applicability of these findings to their own situation.

3.8.3 Sincerity

Sincerity is characterised by self-reflexivity when conducting research (Tracy, 2010). In addition to transparency in methodology and analysis, it is important that I remain critical of my own subjectivity. I have been transparent about my own positionality as discussed in chapters 1 and 3 in relation to my personal experiences, interests and epistemological standpoint. Nevertheless, a limitation to this research is the possibility of researcher bias, given that I conducted interviews, analysed and interpreted the data. One way that this can be reduced is through triangulation of data to strengthen findings as described in section 3.8.1 above.

3.9 Summary of chapter

In this chapter I have outlined the methodology used for my research and associated considerations. Through the use of activity theory, primary and secondary contradictions will be explored in the transition process for young people with SEMH, which may contribute to developing new practices and ways of working in the future. In the following chapter, analysis and findings from the research will be presented.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the detailed findings for each group of participants, secondary school staff, further education staff and EPs. 22 participants were interviewed in total. As outlined in chapter 3, the data were analysed using second-generation activity theory in order to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What supports the transition of young people with SEMH into further education?
- 2) What constrains the transition of young people with SEMH into further education?
- 3) What is the role of the EP, if any, in the transition process?
- 4) How are secondary schools and FE colleges working together in the transition process?

Responses were coded and themed through the process of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Themes were organised into individual activity systems (see figure 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3) and a consistent account for all activity systems as illustrated in figure 4.4 below. The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of themes for each activity system before highlighting the themes for each participant group in tables relating to each node of the second generation activity model, namely subject, object, outcome, rules, community, division of labour and tools. Primary and secondary contradictions are then reviewed before concluding this section with a table of superordinate themes.

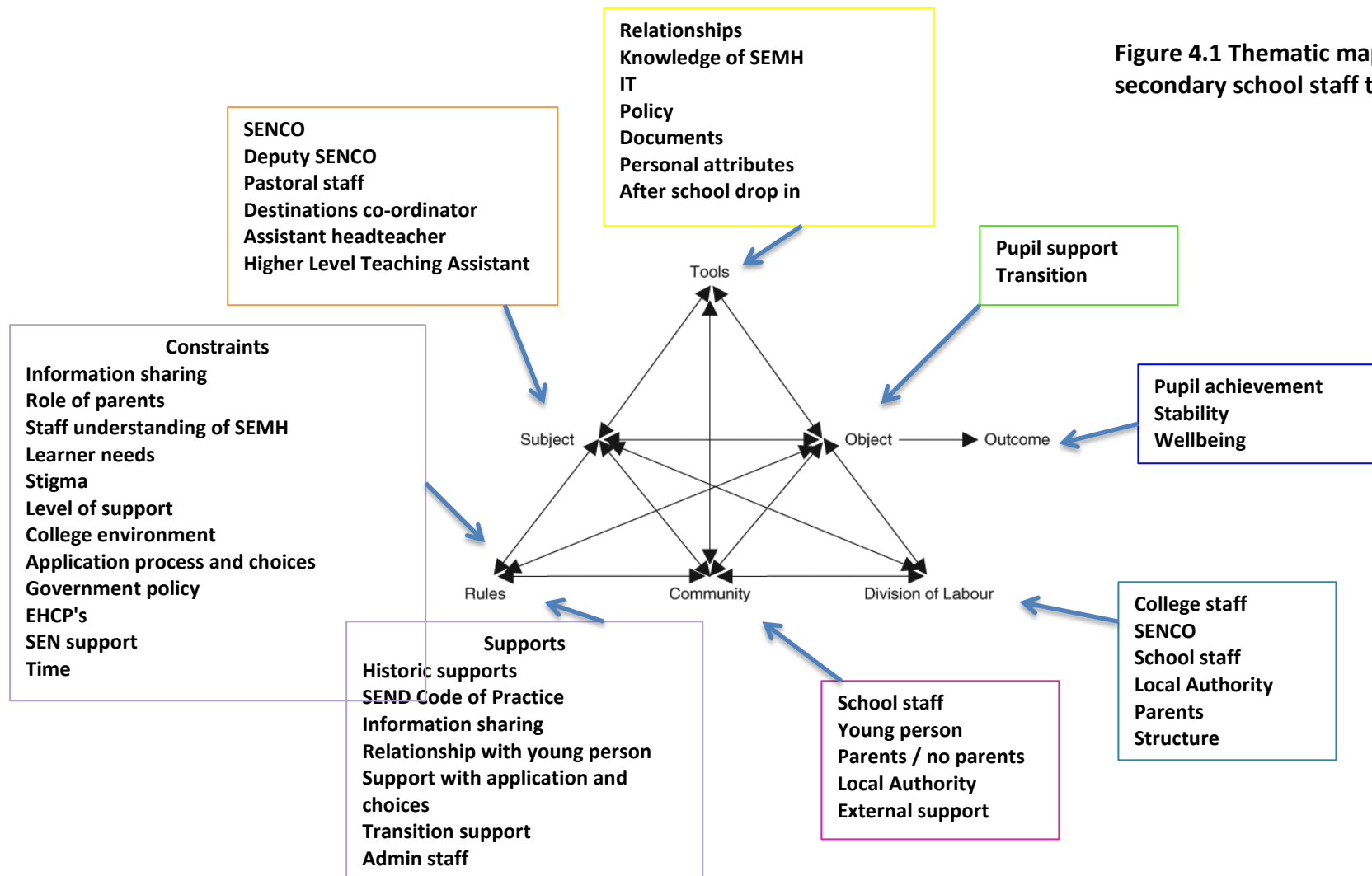


Figure 4.1 Thematic map for secondary school staff themes

4.2 Individual activity system themes

4.2.1 Secondary school staff themes

Figure 4.1 illustrates the themes highlighted through thematic analysis for secondary school staff. As shown in the figure, the object of activity for secondary school staff was supporting young people with SEMH to make a successful transition with a view to enabling them to achieve stability in college and support their sense of wellbeing. Key supports in the transition process were around building positive relationships, supporting the young people to make appropriate course choices and helping them to navigate the application process, which can differ between further education colleges. Staff reported a big gap in terms of support and time that they had available to meet needs of young people on SEN support in comparison to young people with EHCPs. It was felt that this, in addition to a change in environment, alongside poor information sharing, may contribute to unsuccessful transition.

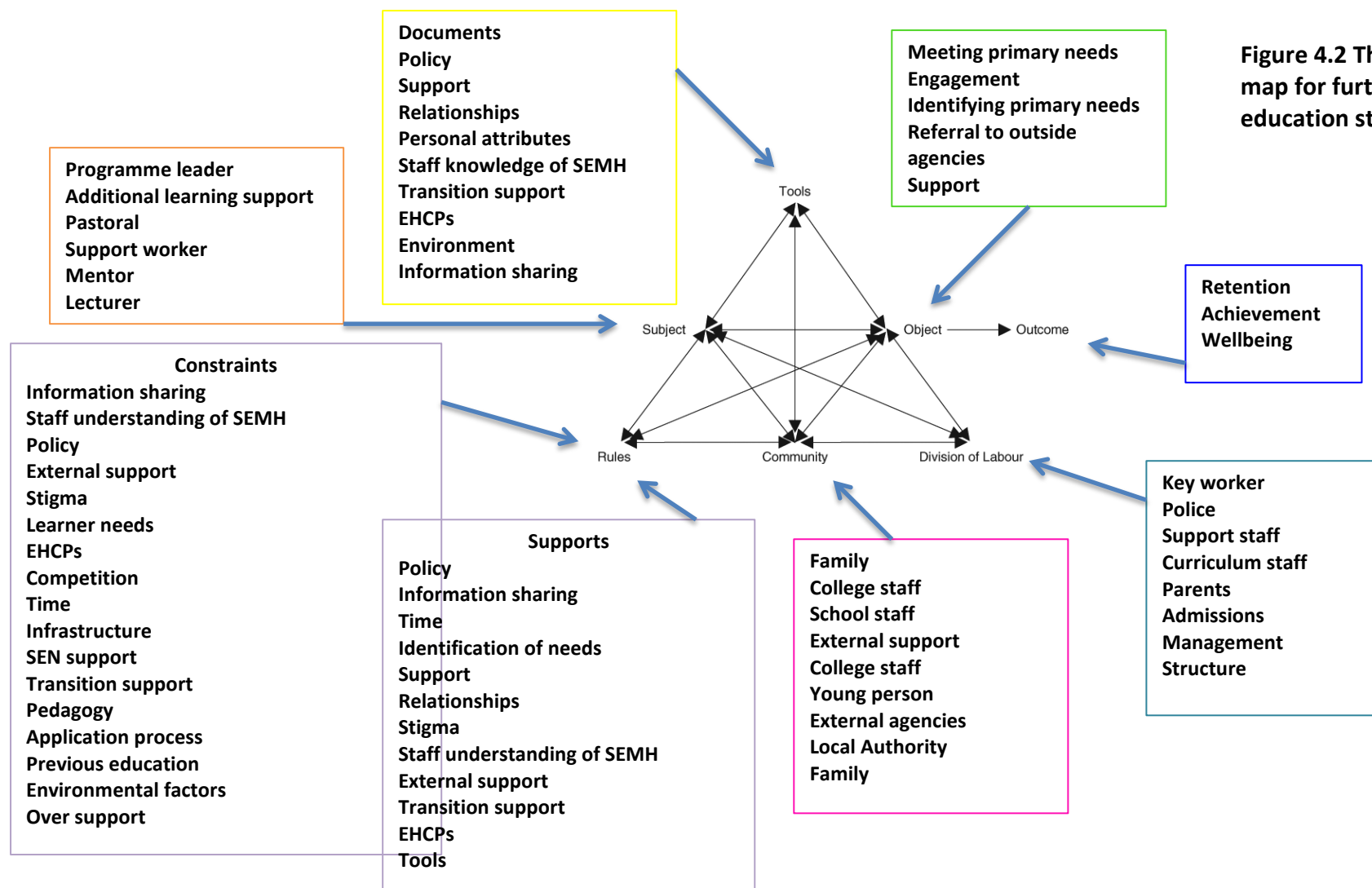


Figure 4.2 Thematic map for further education staff themes

4.2.2 Further education staff themes

Figure 4.2 illustrates the themes highlighted through thematic analysis of further education staff interviews. The object of activity for FE staff was to support and engage the young people but also to identify their primary needs. Staff reported a lack of understanding of the young people's needs due to poor information sharing, which was seen as a constraint to successful transition. FE staff referenced a much wider picture than secondary school staff in terms of noting the impact of environmental factors such as the demographics of the city and meeting the needs of diverse groups who may present with SEMH. Staff felt they had to take on extra responsibility to look what is happening outside of college as learners become more independent from their parents with age. Building positive relationships and getting to know the young people was discussed as an important support in transition.

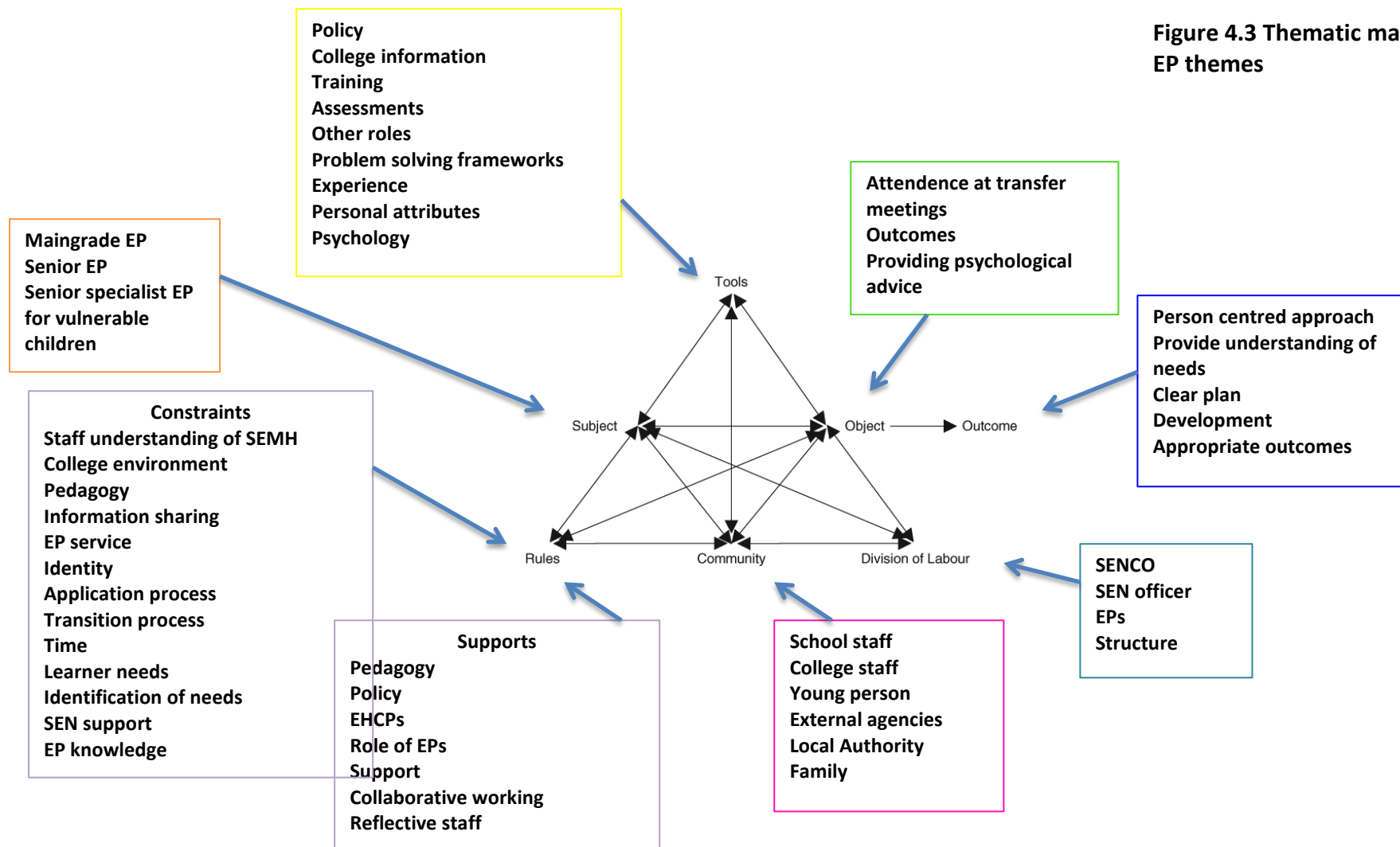


Figure 4.3 Thematic map of EP themes

4.2.3 Educational Psychologist's themes

Figure 4.3 illustrates the themes highlighted through thematic analysis of EP views. The object of activity for EPs was to elicit child's voice, provide appropriate outcomes and deliver up to date psychological advice. This was in reference to the changing needs of young people, for example, a young person could have an EHCP for cognition and learning but at the time of transition to further education, their primary need might be SEMH. EPs reported that they were new to being involved in further education and this had only come into action through the new Code of Practice extending the support for young people up to 25 if needed. EPs felt that this was a support in the transition process. However, in terms of EP involvement, this is limited to statutory work at present, which EPs felt may be a constraint in the transition process for some learners with SEMH. EPs also recognised that their knowledge of FE and what the different institutions can offer, is currently lacking, which can make it difficult to identify appropriate provision. EPs referenced the use of different psychological tools and knowledge as supporting them when involved in transition.

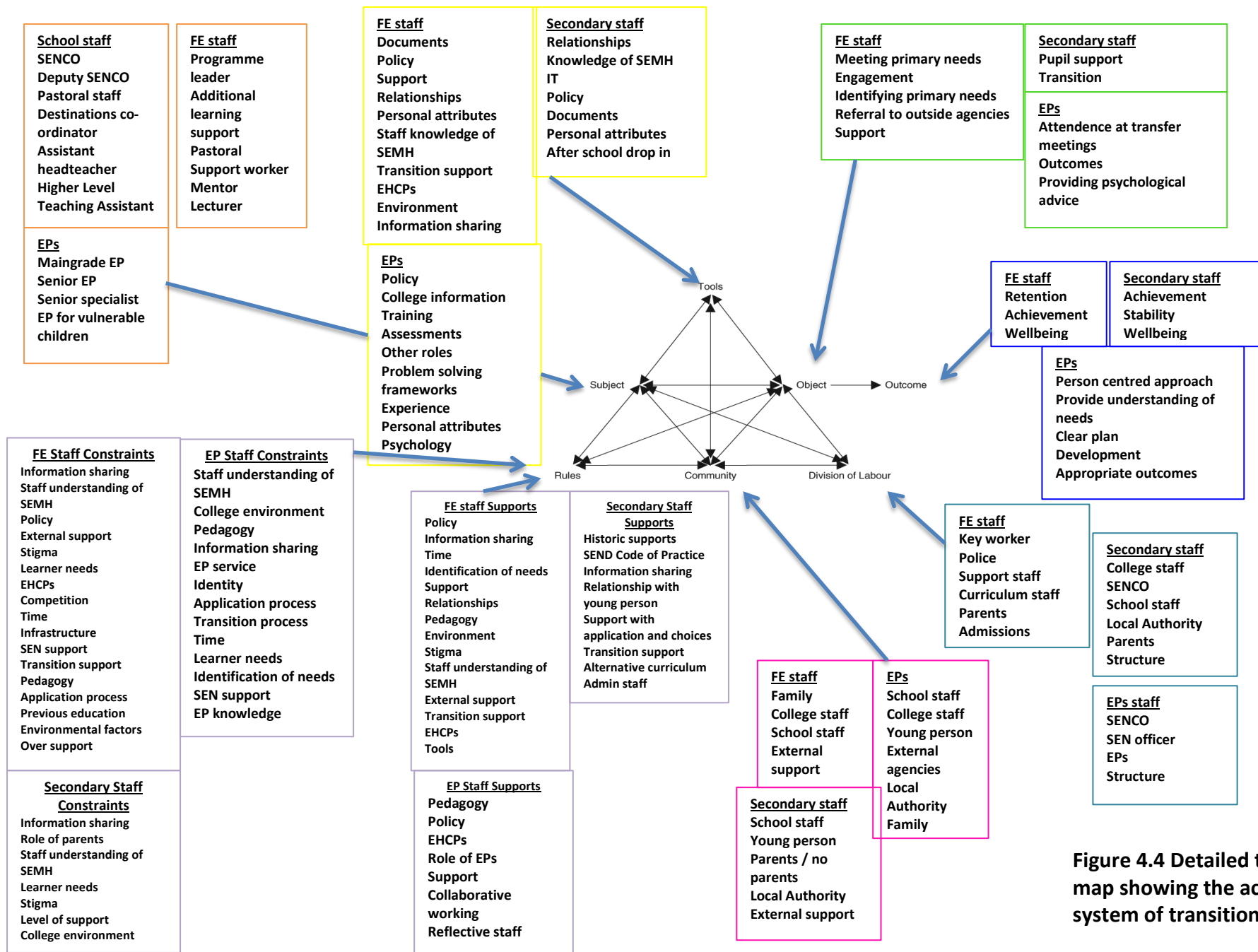


Figure 4.4 Detailed thematic map showing the activity system of transition

4.3 Understanding of SEMH

In order to ensure there was a shared understanding of the population group providing data for the research, I asked all participants what their understanding of SEMH was. Data were coded using thematic analysis as described in chapter 3. Themes that emerged are shown in the table below with direct quotes alongside.

Table 4.1 A table to show themes for understanding of SEMH

| Secondary staff | FE staff | EPs |
|--|---|--|
| Mental health - <i>Associated with autism spectrum disorder</i> Diverse - <i>Difficult to define; very diverse;</i> Behaviour Others understanding - <i>Not up to scratch; one of 'yours' not one of 'ours'</i> | Social difficulties - <i>Social difficulties; haven't learnt social skills; poor social communication</i> Emotional competence - <i>Difficulty controlling emotions</i> Mental health - <i>Self harm; psychosis; mental wellbeing in question; anxiety; depression; personality disorders; pronounced mental health pathologies</i> Learning - <i>Learning difficulties</i> Behaviour - <i>As a barrier to learning</i> Environmental factors - <i>Past trauma; barriers in the home; poverty; background; family life; looked after children; unaccompanied minors seeking asylum</i> Not SEN - <i>SEMH not seen as SEN; separate</i> | Social difficulties - <i>Relationships with others; social inclusion</i> Emotional competence - <i>emotion regulation; emotional understanding</i> Mental health - <i>Depression/bipolar; mental health issues; anxiety; self concept; undiagnosed conditions; mental health systems around the young person; linked to resiliency</i> Behaviour - <i>Can be internalised or externalised; underlying needs behind behaviour</i> |

Secondary staff seemed to find it the most difficult to define SEMH as there was a consensus that it is a diverse area and the term covers many needs. One SENCO discussed the fact that SEMH may come secondary to a different primary need such as autism spectrum disorder.

'Those with ASD don't understand the world around them so you get a lot of mental health issues' (SP2).

In contrast, FE staff and EPs went into detail on specific kinds of needs that SEMH encompasses such as 'anxiety' and 'self harm'. FE staff also made reference to particularly vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors seeking asylum (UMSA) and looked after children (LAC). In addition they noted the wider cultural factors associated with SEMH such as family life and poverty, which were not acknowledged by EPs and secondary staff in response to this question.

EP's were more defined in their response and recognised that externalising or internalising behaviour may reflect underlying needs, which is consistent with the definition of SEMH in the SEND Code of Practice. 'Children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties'. (p.98 section 6.32).

Staff in secondary school raised the issue that curriculum staff members in school do not see SEMH as something they should have to deal with. This theme was also raised later by secondary staff and FE staff under the node of **rules** as a constraint.

‘Staff will often say “This child is behaving badly, think he must be one of yours.” But we need to shift this to one of OURS. We need to adjust teaching and delivery so they don't fall out of class.’ (SP4).

4.4 Second Generation Activity Theory Analysis

The data were initially analysed as three separate activity systems, secondary school staff, FE staff and EPs. The interviews followed the nodes of activity theory and therefore codes were collated around the nodes. Please see Appendix 8 for sample of the data set. Stage 5 of thematic analysis involved organising the themes into a collated account of all three systems as shown in figure 4.4 above. This enabled exploration of similarities and differences alongside highlighting contradictions within and between the nodes of the three systems.

4.4.1 Subject (Role in relation to the transition process)

The subject of an activity system is the person whose perspective is the focus of the analysis. Participants in differing roles for each activity system were interviewed. The subjects are shown in the table below.

Table 4.2 A table to show subjects by professional role and group

| Secondary staff | Further education staff | Educational psychologists |
|---|---|--|
| SP1 - Work experience co-ordinator and destinations | CP1 – Pastoral | EP1 – Senior specialist educational psychologist for vulnerable young people |
| SP2 - SENCO | CP2 – Support worker | |
| SP3 – Assistant head teacher | CP3 – Pastoral | |
| SP4 – SENCO | CP4 – Additional learning support for mental health | EP2 – Main grade educational psychologist |
| SP5 – Pastoral | CP5 – Additional learning support for SEBD | EP3 – Main grade educational psychologist |
| SP6 – Higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) | CP6 – Support worker | EP4 – Senior educational psychologist |
| SP7 – Deputy SENCO | CP7 – Programme area leader | EP5 – Main grade educational psychologist |
| SP8 – Assistant head teacher | CP8 – Lecturer | |
| | CP9 – Additional learning support team leader | |

Views were gathered from staff members in a variety of roles including staff in management roles such as assistant head teacher or programme leader and those working in support roles such as pastoral and additional learning support. Views were also gathered from EPs in main grade and senior positions. It was important to gain perspectives from participants in different positions to understand the different realities of the transition process although it was beyond the scope of this research to explore in depth differences between role positions.

4.4.2 Object (The focus of work)

The object is the goal or motive of the activity system, which in the present research is transition. However, the object for each individual system may differ in terms of what each system is focussing on. The object of work is shown in the table below.

Table 4.3 A table to show themes for the object of work

| Secondary staff | FE staff | EPs |
|---|---|--|
| Pupil support - <i>To engage If they're worried/angry; fighting for young person; access arrangements</i> Transition | Meeting primary needs Engagement Identifying primary needs Referral to outside agencies Support - <i>overcome barriers; to get through course; from mainstream</i> | Attendance at transfer meetings Outcomes Providing psychological advice |

Secondary staff felt that the motive for their work was transition and supporting pupils. A pastoral staff member noted the need to fight for young people with SEMH as their needs are not always recognised.

'What about those young people with mental health needs that you can just hide?'
(SP5)

FE staff shared the motive of pupil support but also highlighted the need to identify and meet primary needs. Not having a clear understanding of young people's needs when they transition into college is noted as a constraint by FE staff under the **rules** node. EPs highlighted their goal as attending transfer meetings (where a young person's statement is transferred to an EHCP) and providing psychological advice and outcomes. EPs acknowledged that working in FE is a new area for them since changes to legislation and the introduction of the Children's and Families Act (2014).

'Its new to us. Over the summer I've been involved with those who have already transitioned but not at the point of transition.' (EP2)

4.4.3 Outcomes

The outcomes are the hoped for outcomes of the focus of the work. These are shown in the table below.

Table 4.4 A table to show themes for the outcome of work

| Secondary staff | FE staff | EPs |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Pupil achievement – <i>successful; achieve potential; get what they want; have sense of achievement</i></p> <p>Stability - <i>continuing in education; every student has a place to go; feels safe to make next steps; person is on the right course</i></p> <p>Equality - <i>to have the best; to have an equal playing field</i></p> <p>Wellbeing - <i>like themselves; happiness build self-belief; have a good time; find people that understand them</i></p> | <p>Retention</p> <p>Achievement - <i>to achieve something; to achieve short term and long term goals; to get through the course; see them progress</i></p> <p>Wellbeing - <i>to have the best; happy, secure and positive; building different relationships; positive experience</i></p> | <p>Person centred - <i>reflect young persons needs, strengths and aspirations; voice of child to be heard; ongoing understanding of personal goals</i></p> <p>Provide understanding of needs - <i>new setting knows strengths and difficulties; current needs and hypotheses</i></p> <p>Clear plan</p> <p>Development - <i>employment skills; independence</i></p> |

EPs talked about outcomes in relation to making sure the new setting has a clear understanding of the young person's current needs. This was also discussed in the **rule's** node in relation to changes in primary need. EPs highlighted the importance of being person centred in their outcomes, ensuring the young person's voice is heard and their goals and aspirations reflected.

Themes raised by secondary school staff and FE staff were around achievement and wellbeing, ensuring that the young people have a 'sense of achievement' and feel 'happy', 'secure' and 'positive'.

‘Even if you can turn around a negative experience slightly to a positive, that’s the ultimate goal (CP4)

Stability and retention were also noted as important outcomes for secondary and FE staff in respect of young people continuing in their education and not becoming NEET.

4.4.4 Rules

The rules are the normal rules and behaviours within a system. These can either support or constrain the object of activity. The rules for each system are highlighted under supports and constraints in the tables below.

Supports

Table 4.5 A table to show themes for supportive rules

| Secondary staff | FE staff | EPs |
|--|---|---|
| Historic Supports – <i>connexions; Learning Difficulty Assessments; Teaching assistants support completion of applications</i> SEND Code of Practice - <i>Senco meetings for SEN three times a year; Young person can apply for own EHCP; Support until 25; focus on outcomes; holistic; person centred; focus on preparation for adulthood; raised profile for SEN</i> Information sharing - <i>Interview pack with synopsis of needs; Personal education plans</i> | Policy - SEND Code of Practice; <i>transport funds; raising of compulsory school age</i> Information sharing - <i>tutors attending learning support meetings; staff vigilant and make referrals; external agencies refer in; personal disclosure; police checks; confidentiality; rapport with schools</i> Time - individual caseloads; <i>flexibility; roles develop to meet needs; large team</i> Identification of needs - <i>interviews to identify barriers; application tick</i> | Pedagogy - develop independence Policy - SEND Code of Practice; Person centred EHCPs - now transfers to FE; <i>greater involvement of EPs; makes more links</i> Role of EPs - principles, epistemology and associated methodology; tools; eliciting child’s voice Support – from schools; from colleges Collaborative working - <i>college links; links with external agencies; historic children’s services; links with school; SEN team; historic connexions</i> Reflective staff |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>(PEPs); NEET list; email contact with college; advertising online; college request information for access arrangements</p> <p>Relationship with young person - support until they leave; individualised approach; key worker respect for students; openness; boundaries; knowledge of young person</p> <p>Support with application and choices - after school drop in; parents on the ball; careers library; online careers resource; careers fair; plan B; course ranking careers advisor; job research starts in year 9; tutor knowledge of destination</p> <p>Transition support - taster sessions; transition meetings; work experience; post-16 evenings; link course; September guarantee by May half term</p> <p>Alternative curriculum</p> <p>Admin staff</p> | <p>box; one page profile; assessment by specialist; disclosure forms; learners more aware of needs</p> <p>Support - counselling services; self-referral; support to socialise; pastoral; approach learners; individualised approach; various pathways; open door policy; connect within first 6 weeks</p> <p>Relationships - improving with curriculum staff; positive feedback to parents; rapport with schools</p> <p>Pedagogy - bespoke learning; map classes based on need; ensure learner in right class; skills for adulthood; mixed learners; choice of courses; independence</p> <p>Stigma – reduction; new start; specific mental health role</p> <p>Staff understanding of SEMH – training; background experience</p> <p>External support – connexions; youth work team; serving the authority as a customer; outside knowledge of college</p> <p>Transition support - taster sessions; welcome event; school staff visit with learners; transition days; induction programme</p> <p>EHCPs - Provide better support; safeguard; EP reports</p> <p>Tools - Self-harm action plan; team teach</p> | |
|---|--|--|

In terms of historical rules, many participants referenced the support that they used to get from Connexions, which was an impartial careers and guidance service. Most connexions services closed down following cuts with the introduction of the Conservative and Liberal Coalition in 2010.

'now its gone (connexions) the simplicity has gone' (SP8)

'They were the middle person between colleges and the LA and would support with referrals and find things out.' (CP2)

Some participants also talked about the support of having Learning Difficulty Assessments (LDAs). LDAs were documents previously put in place to support young people with SEN entering post-16 education. The LDA team has since changed to the Special Educational Needs team within the local authority.

'KB used to come in and sit down with all children with a statement and return again in May to organise transition for those with more severe needs but now they're the SEN team and not the LDA team its fallen back on the SENCO. With LDAs you would know which team to send information to.' (SP2)

In relation to current policy, the SEND Code of Practice (2015) was identified as a support for all three systems in terms of aspects such as raising the profile of SEN and being person centred. The introduction of EHCPs was also noted as helpful as support for young people is now in place until the age of 25 if needed. In addition one FE staff member thought EHCPs act as a 'safeguard' for learners with SEMH.

'Settings can't just get rid of learners' (CP5)

This also raised issues about those learners with SEMH who do not have the 'safeguard' of an EHCP, which is discussed under constraints below.

EPs talked about EHCPs being helpful in respect of widening the scope of EP work in to FE settings.

'I was only starting to become involved because of the new EHC focus being up to 25. So I guess that's a helping factor as its brought us into that.' (EP5)

One of the main supports that FE staff and secondary staff talked about, was the support and relationships that they offer young people with SEMH in their settings. For example, using an individualised approach, having an open door policy and treating young people with respect. Having good relationships and support in education was highlighted as an important protective factor for young people with SEMH through the research presented in the literature review (Attwood et al 2004; O'Riordan 2011).

'It's all about equality and treating students with respect. Very much devoted to building an emotional bank account.' (SP5)

'I pride myself on knowing every student that walks through that door which helps them transition into college and away.' (CP2)

Information sharing was noted as a support by secondary staff and FE staff, in relation to information shared between the two settings, within their own settings and with external agencies such as the youth offending service (YOS). Similarly, EPs

noted the importance of collaborative working and building links with schools and colleges.

'It helps if you've got a person you can link with that understands and can organise their staff and bring them together in a meaningful way.' (EP5)

Yet, information sharing is something that was also raised as a constraining rule by participants as highlighted below.

In relation to education and pedagogy, secondary school staff spoke about the importance of supporting young people with SEMH to complete their FE application forms, consider different courses and have a plan B if they do not get the results that they need. Similarly, FE staff talked about making sure the learner is in the right class once they have made the transition to college.

'We consider what course would be best for learners and map classes based on needs to make it fairer for them.' (CP3)

Having events that support transition was talked about by FE staff and secondary staff as a supportive rule, for example taster days and welcome events. This contrasts with time to attend and knowledge of these events discussed in constraints below.

Finally, some FE staff felt that there has been a reduction in stigma and an increased awareness around mental health.

'There's been a change in young people wanting staff to know about their needs in terms of stigma.' (CP3)

'The fact the role exists shows that mental health is on the agenda.' (CP9)

Again stigma is also discussed as a constraint below.

Constraints

Table 4.6 A table to show themes for constraining rules

| Secondary staff | FE staff | EPs |
|---|--|--|
| Information sharing - college don't request information; No point of handover; Knowledge of who to contact if young person doesn't attend; confidentiality; no communication between staff in school; no feedback from college Role of parents - have own needs; no involvement; understanding of school role; understanding of processes; push young person to wrong course; understanding of SEN Staff understanding of SEMH - No SENCO training; people's understanding of mental health; school staff don't view as their problem Learner needs - level of mental health; not seeing the point in attending appointments; understanding of own needs; age lots to contend with; ability to fill in forms Stigma - Young person | Information sharing - no communication between school and college; confidentiality; data protection; age of consent Staff understanding of SEMH - historically not as much; not trained to support mental health; misunderstanding of support roles; SEMH not seen as primary need; curriculum staff knowledge Policy - measured on outcomes; unrealistic time frames and targets; compulsory education age; judged on retention; conflict with Ofsted; expectations; political agenda External support - used to have family intervention; threshold too high to be involved; long wait lists; cuts to services; no careers advisor; LA not seeing wider picture Stigma - label used as an excuse; stigmatises mental health | Staff understanding of SEMH - not seen as high need; not enough focus on social interaction College environment - too flexible; inflexible in meeting social and education needs; impact on wellbeing Pedagogy – self driven learning Information sharing - barrier with adult services; Complicated EP service - no service level agreement no link EP Identity - self attribution and belief; social status; self concept; behaviour masks needs Application process - suitability of course; uncertainty over results and placement Transition process - info too difficult for learner to understand; no clear plan Time - Transfer of statements; timescale for statutory; to familiarise with new assessments |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p><i>doesn't want support; social media; reputation; reluctance to disclose; trendy to be depressed; don't want to be defined by need; seen as bad behaviour</i></p> <p>Level of support - college - sink or swim; No teaching assistants for SEN support; fewer people who know the young person; timing young person seen as an adult; onus on young person to be independent</p> <p>College environment - knowledge of college structure/who does what; less nurturing; size of setting; not knowing college staff; behaviour policy</p> <p>Application process and choices – paperwork; no clear policy; poor advertising of courses; timing of results; UCAS online / access to IT; competition; different applications; online passwords; no clear process for SEN support; amount of choices to make; applying to the right course; GCSE results difficulty of course; no vocational option in sixth form</p> <p>Government policy - emphasis on attainment; change in compulsory education; focus on aspirations; Code of practice not fully implemented</p> <p>EHCP's - no link between aspiration and reality (EP</p> | <p>Learner needs - behaviour; academic ability</p> <p>EHCPs – outcomes business focussed not learning; unrealistic aspirations; named provision but staff voice not heard; time bound and difficult to collate; funding</p> <p>Time</p> <p>Infrastructure - mismatch between funding and targets; no time; no training; accountability; no staff</p> <p>SEN support - no blanket document; no safeguards</p> <p>Transition process - no clear pathway; schools lack knowledge of college; complex students brought late</p> <p>Pedagogy – change in self-directed learning</p> <p>Application process - may miss needs; language barrier; learner understanding of course</p> <p>Previous education – Pupil referral units; previous restraint; lack of adequate support</p> <p>Environmental factors – Demographics; family; parents</p> <p>Over support</p> | <p>Learner needs - complex mental health needs; change in primary need; literacy needs; anxiety/school refusal impacts on engagement; may lack goals; difficult to engage</p> <p>Identification of needs - info not passed on from school; EPs only involved at EHCP level; timing of EP involvement</p> <p>SEN support – no continuity</p> <p>EP knowledge - support available in college; courses available in college</p> |
|---|--|--|

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| reports) Time - balance transition and GCSE's; for staff to attend taster days | | |
|--|--|--|

Questions about constraining factors in the process of transition produced the most discussion by participants. The most prevalent themes are reported below. As already noted, multiple themes that were raised as supports were also raised as constraints.

Policy was discussed as a constraint by secondary staff and FE staff in relation to several points. It was felt that the Government provide unrealistic time frames and targets, with an emphasis on attainment without acknowledging young people's needs or the wider cultural issues of the environment.

'The emphasis is on attainment, but have they got the mental stability?' (SP5)

'We're measured on the same outcomes as higher performing colleges without recognition of the demographic.' (CP3)

'Whilst the primary focus is frontline support, when OFSTED come their focus will be if you've kept appropriate records.' (CP4)

In addition, FE staff reported that with austerity measures, cuts to services and long wait lists have meant that they have to take on more responsibility for learners with SEMH.

'Colleges have to take on extra responsibility to look what's happening outside of college.' (CP4)

'The culture is everything coming back onto education.' (CP2)

'The onus is on staff but we're not trained counsellors.' (CP1)

The responsibility placed on FE staff was also acknowledged in relation to the demands of EHCPs.

'In principle EHCPs are good but in practice it doesn't work. The onus is on us to train up without consideration of who is best placed.' (CP3)

'We're not always listened to. Just because we're the named provision, it doesn't make us the right place' (CP1)

Furthermore both secondary and FE staff felt that the targets and aspirations set in EHCPs were unrealistic.

'You can't put the reality brakes on in an EHCP meeting. It's difficult to pick the place to have the conversation. You don't want to temper aspiration but they need to have a degree of realism.' (SP2)

'There's a mismatch between infrastructure and targets in EP reports. If we tried to meet them all, the young person would never be in lesson.' (CP3)

This 'mismatch' may relate to EP knowledge of FE settings, which EPs acknowledged as a constraint.

'I couldn't say with confidence oh yeah when you go there you'll be able to access this so it's difficult to recommend.' (EP5)

FE staff felt that schools also have a lack of knowledge of the support offered in FE. This was highlighted through contradictions in the section below.

Although EHCPs were noted as a support in safeguarding learners with SEMH, all groups reported that SEMH is still not recognised as a primary need.

'Mental health is still not seen as a primary need that can kick off the EHCP process. Culturally its not been there before so it's important as an institution to test the water.' (CP4)

'The SEN register is not yet taking in those 4 umbrella terms. We're in the maelstrom of change so only just identifying gaps.' (SP4)

'Its those that are becoming disengaged with their learning and at risk of dropping out completely that aren't seen, that isn't seen as a need necessarily its seen as their approach to learning'. (EP5)

Many young people with SEMH do not have an EHCP but are on SEN support. This is the graduated approach of assess, plan, do, review that schools put in place to meet SEN needs. Being on SEN support was highlighted as a constraint by all three groups, in relation to the level of support received for these young people and funding.

'Those on SEN support get the same support as everybody else, which probably isn't enough. There's always been a gap for SEN support, they've been left to get on with it, and there's still a gap now as the focus is on EHCPs. A lot of young people with SEMH don't have EHCP so they need their key worker but we can't be involved with all of them.' (SP7)

'Those on SEN support don't have TAs so you can only capture some adjustments. It's more difficult to define than those with an EHCP.' (SP4)

'That would be my concern. The EHCP gives some continuity but for those on SEN support, what mechanisms are in place?' (EP3)

'There are scenarios where there are some learners who were previously statemented and now they're not but there are no alternative funding streams. Resistance from the authority makes it difficult for us to fund support. There's a difference of multiple thousands of pounds so we can't even entertain the idea of one to one.' (CP4)

The complexity of needs presented by young people with SEMH was noted as a constraint by all three systems in relation to factors such as mental health, engagement and behaviour. One EP talked about the interaction of having complex needs and transitioning to a new setting.

'I worked with a girl who tried to start college but was unsuccessful. As she became older her mental health needs became more significant and she was diagnosed with PD. It was a lot to take on a new environment, it was an assault on her senses and too much to assimilate alongside changes in personal life with a new diagnosis.' (EP2)

FE staff report that learners with complex needs are often brought to them late so they cannot offer them the 'secure package' that they need. This relates to information sharing, which was recognised as a constraint by all three systems. FE staff report that secondary school staff do not always pass information on to them.

'It's a massive constraint when you're chasing schools to get all the information, sometimes you're at Christmas before you understand a person's support needs.' (CP4)

'Everyone's scared to share information so there's no communication to give cohesive support.' (CP7)

'The biggest barrier is joined up thinking with previous establishments. We don't see the information until later so don't understand the learner quickly enough.' (CP8)

The question of effective information sharing was also raised by EPs.

'Do they drop out early because those mechanisms aren't in place and needs identified quickly enough?' (EP4)

Additionally, sharing information with external agencies was highlighted as a constraint by FE staff and EPs due to the age of learners and shift to adult services.

'There's more barriers to communication. She withdrew consent for me to communicate with the people supporting her through adult mental health. She's made the choice to stop people communicating around her for all sorts of valid reasons but then its hard to have a picture of all her needs.' (EP2)

'The learner doesn't have the confidence to seek information so communication breaks down. If we knew appointment times and things we could reinforce and support.' (CP3)

This may relate to the perceived stigma around SEMH, which was highlighted as a constraint by secondary and FE staff.

'Learners may not always tick the additional learning support box as they've been labelled in secondary school and want a clean slate.' (CP4)

'How much do you tell a college? If college perceives a child to be a challenge they might not be so willing to accept them.' (SP4)

Stigma was also felt to play a part in staff understanding of SEMH. As mentioned in section 4.2, SEMH is not seen as something that all staff should have to work with.

'Curriculum staff can find it daunting as there's a wide variety of learners with a wide variety of needs some of which have a stigma like schizophrenia.' (CP9)

In addition, one FE support worker referenced having to develop new tools in terms of their interview process to help to identify learner needs.

'We weren't being given any info which led to a change in our interview process as there were so many incidences of things that weren't expected.' (CP5).

Having the time to support transition of such complex learners, particularly those on SEN support was noted as a constraint by all three systems.

'When it comes to year 11 you're flying by the seat of your pants. In terms of supported transition it's not good. But with EHCPs it's better.' (SP4)

'In an ideal world it would be great to take the young people to college. That would be platinum standard. I haven't got enough hours in the day for these children.' (SP5)

'There's no time for SEN support. All of this is about time.' (SP7)

Secondary staff and FE staff also discussed the gap of time between leaving school and starting college as a difficulty.

'There's no communication between the end of school and the start of college which is a long time for anxious learners.' (CP2)

'With SEN kids, 6 months is a long time, a year is a lifetime away so they don't think about the reality of the situation. "I was only autistic at school, I'm not going to be autistic at college"' (SP2)

Finally, secondary school and FE staff discussed the role of parents sometimes being a constraint in the transition process. This was in relation to parent needs and level of understanding.

'Quite often children with SEMH also have parents with those issues so you're not just transitioning the young person you're transitioning the parent.' (SP2)

'Some parents get very confused about the whole transition process because of their level of understanding.' (SP6)

'Parents tend to focus on the negative and the young person doesn't always have a say. Or the parents hide things.' (CP5)

4.4.5 Community

The community are the people who take part and belong to the activity. The community members of each system are shown in the table below.

Table 4.7 A table to show themes for the community involved in transition

| Secondary staff | FE staff | EPs |
|--|---|--|
| College staff School staff - support and standards team; attendance officer; tutors head of year; designated post-16; school counsellor; admin; SENCO; head of house; exams office Young person Parents / no parents Local Authority – no EPs; NEET team External support - historic connexions; careers team | Family - parents / carers; siblings College staff - recruitment team; youth access hub; support staff; college counsellor; key worker; tutor; curriculum staff; wellbeing team; safeguarding team; SEBD team; liaison officer School staff - head teachers External support - EPs/No EPs; CAMHS; police safety officer; social workers; local authority; multi-agency support group; Youth offending service | School staff – SENCO; teaching assistant College staff – not always present Young person External agencies – CAMHS; occupational therapy; speech and language therapy; employers offering apprenticeship Local Authority – SEN team; social workers; youth offending service Family – parents; carers |

All groups identified school staff, college staff, external support and families as part of the transition process. Although families were highlighted, it was discussed that parents/carers are not always a part of transition due to varying factors such as learner needs and age of consent.

‘Many parents don’t come to meetings but it would be useful to convey needs’ (SP7)

‘If they’re under 18 we will involve parents if they’re over 18 its up to the learner’ (CP9)

‘There’s not always a need, it depends if the young person is more vulnerable and doesn’t have mental capacity or if the young person wants them there’ (EP3)

Some participants from secondary schools and FE settings noted that EPs are not currently a part of the transition process.

'EPs in college is not a thing' (SP4)

'EPs are notoriously hard to get hold of' (CP1)

As mentioned in the **Object** node, EPs themselves acknowledge that working in FE is a new area for them, despite previous literature identifying a need for EP involvement in FE (Clark 2014; Hayton 2009).

4.4.6. Division of labour

Division of labour refers to power structure and who does what within the activity.

Themes from this node are shown in table below.

Table 4.8 A table to show themes for division of labour in the activity of transition

| Secondary staff | FE staff | EPs |
|---|---|---|
| College staff - chase applications; used to call school staff SENCO - EHCP paperwork; flag potential NEET School staff - Link with external agencies; head of year chases paperwork in college; post-16 staff check destinations; pastoral support; assistant head monitors process; tutor checks and monitors Local Authority - NEET team pick up NEETS Parents - Pursue college support Structure - roles develop with awareness; top down structure; same structure for 10 years; no formal pathway | Key worker – takes responsibility for learner and meetings Police – share information within boundaries Support staff - trained selves; find info on mental health and share with tutors; ensure transition goes smoothly; act as an advocate; identify learner needs; contact school after interview Curriculum staff – assessment and interview Parents – review support Admissions – pass info onto learning support Management – offer personal support to staff Structure - roles unclear; defined roles as an institution; roles evolve; | SENCO - work with receiving college; pass on information; produce transition plans; decide EP allocation SEN officer - directs to EPS; negotiates with school EPs – consultation; SEP allocates transfer work; problem solving Structure - roles clear in EHCP process; child's voice taken into account |

| | | |
|--|----------------------------|--|
| | <i>whoever's available</i> | |
|--|----------------------------|--|

When discussing roles FE staff and secondary staff highlighted that the structure was unclear and roles develop over time. One SENCO admitted that when it comes to who does what in the transition process, they tend to 'wing it'. This was echoed by FE staff who also said that when it comes to structure, it is unclear.

'It just falls where your strength lies' (CP1)

This was also referenced in relation to those young people on SEN support with SEMH as, highlighted in the **Rules** section.

'It's never been clear cut for SEN support and we wouldn't organise transition normally. There's definitely a gap' (SP7)

FE staff discussed roles developing in relation to need.

'The job became so big we had to take on a mental health specialist.' (CP9)

Secondary staff and FE staff reported that it was the role of FE staff to contact the school after interviews and chase applications, which FE staff noted as a constraint in the **rules** node. Despite FE staff acknowledging secondary staff as part of the community, they did not identify a role for secondary staff when thinking about who does what.

Secondary staff and FE staff saw the role of the parents as reviewing support. EPs did not acknowledge a role for parents. As highlighted in the **rules** node, some staff feel that the involvement of parents can be a constraint.

Neither FE staff nor secondary school staff highlighted a role for EPs. EPs reported that it was the role of secondary staff to decide if EPs had a place in the process as the school SENCO decides EP allocation. It also relates to the current model of EP service delivery.

'Maybe they (secondary school) feel they know the young persons needs well enough so they're not a priority' (EP3)

'Service delivery doesn't allow us to be involved in lesser priorities. We're not involved in SEN support.' (EP1)

One EP reflected on their role in previous transition experiences.

'Our role was clear as we were working consultatively so we weren't taking on like intervention work or additional duties, it was problem solving and consultative. I think we could definitely have a role but in consultations' (EP4).

4.4.7 Tools

The tools node relates to tools or artefacts, which mediate the object of activity.

Themes for each system are shown in the table below.

Table 4.9 A table to show themes for the tools used in transition

| Secondary staff | FE staff | EPs |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Relationships – <i>parents; Informal; contacts with college; knowing the young person; having a key person</i></p> <p>Knowledge of SEMH – <i>experience; anger cycle; staff training</i></p> <p>IT - <i>Online careers resource; UCAS progress; Online application</i></p> <p>Policy - <i>Statutory guidance; DfE guidance - keeping children safe</i></p> <p>Documents - <i>simplified progress sheet; Access arrangements; transition pack; prospectus</i></p> <p>Personal attributes – <i>listening; individual approach; positive role models; expectations on staff</i></p> <p>After school drop in</p> | <p>Documents - <i>learner profile; PRAG rating; leaflets on different conditions; criminal convictions sheets; positive handling plan; assessment paperwork</i></p> <p>Policy - <i>duty of safeguarding; risk assessment</i></p> <p>Support - <i>from senior management; open door policy; building resilience; support staff; daily journal of support</i></p> <p>Relationships - <i>rapport with external agencies; knowing individual pupils; chit chat' with pupils</i></p> <p>Personal attributes – <i>compassion; being approachable; banter; open minded; background in military</i></p> <p>Staff knowledge of SEMH – <i>Training; psychological theory; revision of roles; CPD; SEMH/resiliency books; Cognitive behaviour therapy resources; Incredible five point scale</i></p> <p>Transition support - <i>taster sessions; welcome event; inclusion programmes; link courses</i></p> <p>EHCPs</p> <p>Environment – <i>the hangout</i></p> <p>Information sharing</p> | <p>Policy – <i>SEND Code of Practice</i></p> <p>College information</p> <p>Training – <i>Real post-16 training</i></p> <p>Assessments – <i>Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales II, Cognitive Assessment Profile</i></p> <p>Other roles - <i>SEN officers; SEN inclusion services; business support; parents</i></p> <p>Problem solving frameworks – <i>consultation; circle of adults; Planning alternative tomorrows with hope (PATH)</i></p> <p>Experience – <i>engaging young people with SEMH</i></p> <p>Personal attributes - <i>rapport building; relationship with school; humanistic qualities</i></p> <p>Psychology - <i>humanistic psychology; solution focussed; personal construct psychology; motivational interviewing</i></p> |

All three systems noted the importance of personal attributes such as being approachable, rapport building and taking an individual approach. Relationships with

the young people, parents and external agencies were also noted as an important tool.

'Showing them compassion is showing them change - they might not have that at home.' (CP3)

'Humanistic qualities like positive regard that you would be applying to your interactions.' (EP4)

Secondary staff and FE staff talked about documents outlining learner needs as a tool for supporting transition. One setting used rating documents as a way of prioritising the wealth of learners with SEMH on their role.

'Learners don't know they're rated but it determines a child's vulnerability.. so if they're rated purple we'll make sure we meet once a week.' (CP1).

Secondary staff and FE staff reported that knowledge of SEMH and training was a useful tool. FE staff and EPs also talked about the use of psychology in supporting transition. For FE staff, this was drawing on particular theories, such as 'Maslow's hierarchy of needs'. For EPs this was specific tools or interventions such as motivational interviewing.

Policy was mentioned as a tool for all three systems in regard to safeguarding, keeping children safe and the SEND Code of Practice. Although as highlighted in the **rules** section this can present both supports and constraints.

One FE staff member talked about having a safe space in the college environment as a useful tool.

'It's a safe space where there's always a tutor in there for if a learner comes in late and feels self conscious or had a fight with their mum.' (CP2)

This contrasts with secondary school views highlighted in the **rules** node that FE settings do not provide a 'nurturing' environment.

4.5 Contradictions

Through the analysis, primary and secondary contradictions were highlighted. Primary contradictions occur *within* a component of the activity system and secondary contradictions occur *between* the components of the activity system. Contradictions can occur in the following ways:

4.10 A table to show ways contradictions can occur

| Primary contradictions | Secondary contradictions |
|---|---|
| Within the nodes of one system e.g. secondary staff | Between the nodes of one system e.g. secondary rules v tools |
| Within the nodes but between two or three systems e.g. secondary staff and FE staff | Between the nodes of two or three systems e.g. FE rules v EP outcomes |

4.5.1 Primary contradictions

4.11 A table to show primary contradictions with corresponding quotes

| No. | Location of contradiction | Contradiction | Extract from interview |
|-----|---------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | Rules – secondary v FE | FE staff not requesting information v secondary staff not passing information on | <i>'College's don't request the information' (SP3) v 'Schools aren't keen to share. There should be more connections so there's not this issue with getting information.'</i> (CP8) |
| 2 | Rules – FE v EP | Flexible learning v inflexibility | <i>'We consider what course would be best for learners and map classes based on needs to make it fairer for them.'</i> (CP3) v <i>'And I guess that's going to impact on your emotional wellbeing not allowing somebody to succeed and accessing that. Which is what college should be really about, doing something that you enjoy and it was holding him back because they were saying he can do that but he has to do his foundation course first because he had quite significant needs in literacy as well so his ability to comprehend text that he was reading. So it was just that inflexibility that was a hindrance.'</i> (EP5) |
| 3 | Rules – secondary and FE | Reduction in stigma v wanting a clean slate | <i>'It's almost like a badge, a medal which in a way makes it easier to excuse behaviour but I'd rather wade through that than nobody talked'</i> (CP1) <i>'It's trendy now to be depressed.'</i> (SP2) v <i>'Learners may not always tick the additional learning support box as they've been labelled in secondary school and want a clean slate.'</i> (CP4) <i>'They don't want to be seen as different to everyone else.'</i> (SP5) |
| 4 | Rules – secondary v FE | FE environment as helpful v FE environment as constraint | <i>'The previous environment may make them behave in certain ways but when they're here they don't have those issues because they have more independence.'</i> (CP5) v <i>'Leaving school where they're familiar with staff to unfamiliar environment where support may not be there. Some young people still need firm structures'.</i> (SP3) |
| 5 | Rules - FE | Time v making connections | <i>There's a higher drop out rate in the first 6 weeks. I have 200 students on my list so</i> |

| | | | |
|---|------------------------|--|---|
| | | | <i>connecting with them all is quite a task. We need to target the most vulnerable (CP5) v 'Secondary schools and SENCOs are busy and so are we. There's no time to connect with so many pupils.'</i> (CP9) |
| 6 | Rules – Secondary v FE | College not supporting all needs v college giving additional support | <i>'It's not just about the course and academics. Where are they going to eat? How are they going to get there? Colleges aren't so good at thinking about that (SP4) v 'We do things such as help young people get food parcels to make sure their underlying needs are met so they are ready for learning' (CP2)</i> |

4.5.2 Secondary contradictions

Table 4.12 A table to show secondary contradictions with corresponding quotes

| No. | Location of contradiction | Contradiction | Extract from interview |
|-----|---|--|---|
| 1 | Object v rules (FE) | Engagement v retention not feasible | <i>'...to overcome barriers and help young people engage in a normal educational pathway.'</i> (CP7) <i>'We're judged on our ability to retain students but sometimes going straight into mainstream education isn't feasible.'</i> (CP4) |
| 2 | Outcome (EP) v rules (secondary and FE) | Being person centred v unrealistic aspirations | <i>'..to reflect the young person's needs, strengths and aspirations.'</i> (EP4) v <i>'You can't put the reality brakes on in an EHCP meeting. It's difficult to pick the place to have the conversation. You don't want to temper aspiration but they need to have a degree of realism.'</i> (SP2) |
| 3 | Object v rule (secondary) | Transition support v not having time to support | <i>'.. to support collaborative transition.'</i> (SP7) v <i>'In an ideal world it would be great to take the young people to college. That would be platinum standard. I haven't got enough hours in the day for these children.'</i> (SP5) |
| 4 | Rule (secondary) v Tool (FE) | FE environment not nurturing v having a safe space | <i>'There's no nurture and support in college.'</i> (SP7) v <i>'It's a safe space where there's always a tutor in there e.g. if a learner comes in late and feels self conscious or had a fight with their mum.'</i> (CP1) |
| 5 | Division of | EP rely on SENCO to | <i>'If I was like saying these types of things</i> |

| | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|---|---|
| | labour (EP) v Rule (FE) | pass information onto college v College don't receive information | <i>would be helpful, or the young person was identifying things that would be helpful for them its then who takes that forward and I guess we were relying on the senco to pass that on to the next setting.'</i> (EP2) v <i>'We rarely get anything unless it's a child protection issue.'</i> (CP4) |
| 6 | Tools (secondary) v rules (FE) | Synopsis of needs v too much information | <i>'We put together a transition pack with a synopsis of needs.'</i> (SP7) v <i>'It would be helpful to have blanket document outlining learning and mental health needs, not 15 years of school info!'</i> (CP1) |

The majority of contradictions emerged within and between the **rules** node. These contradictions highlighted the different realities that participants hold of the transition process. Many of the contradictions demonstrated misconceptions that the different systems held of each other, for example the contradiction between secondary staff seeing the FE environment as a constraint but FE staff seeing the environment as a support. The contradictions contribute to data analysis through highlighting areas of tension within transition, which can contribute to development and change in the future.

4.6 Summary of chapter

The data collected has been analysed and explored through the different nodes of second-generation activity theory. 22 participants were interviewed for this research, which presents a detailed picture and multiple perspectives of the transition process. Due to the quantity of data and themes presented, the focus of discussion will be on superordinate themes that were highlighted through further refinement of data using thematic analysis (see appendix 9 for example thematic

map). These themes are displayed in the table below and will be discussed in the following chapter.

Table 4.13 Superordinate themes

| Superordinate themes |
|-----------------------------|
| Policy |
| SEN support |
| Information sharing |
| Stigma |
| Knowledge of SEMH |
| Transition support |
| Identity |
| Pedagogy |
| Environmental factors |

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Through analysis of the results superordinate themes emerged as shown in table 4.13 above. These themes are the focus of discussion in this chapter and will be related to the content highlighted in the literature review. Some of these themes link and overlap with one another demonstrating the interactive nature of the object of activity. The use of activity theory provides a further level of analysis through which to view transition and answer the aims and questions of this research.

5.2 Policy

5.2.1 Education Health and Care Plans

The new SEND Code of Practice was introduced in 2015 and as such, the ramifications of this are still being considered. To quote a school SENCO from the present research, 'We are still in the maelstrom of change' (SP4). Themes pertaining to this policy were prevalent throughout the majority of participant interviews, in relation to both positive and negative aspects. The ways in which this policy was viewed as supporting the transition of SEMH was through raising the profile of SEN and placing the emphasis on a person centred approach. Indeed recognising the voice of the child is a prominent topic within the policy. However, many participants felt that in practice, this can cause some contention.

One of the biggest changes with the introduction of new guidance has been the transfer of statements and LDA's to Education, Health and Care Plans. As mentioned above, promoting the voice of the child is now a key theme within the SEND Code of

Practice. EPs in the present research felt that it was their role to ensure that the child's voice is heard and subsequently the outcome of their work in transition is to reflect the young person's strengths and aspirations. However, a secondary contradiction was highlighted between this outcome and secondary and FE staff viewing EP reports as a constraining rule due to unrealistic targets and outcomes set.

Secondary staff noted a difficulty between not wanting to 'temper aspirations' (SP2) for young people but needing to be realistic in what they can achieve. In addition, FE staff felt that the onus on child's voice results in their voice not always being heard. Despite being the named provision, they may not be the right setting for the young person, which ultimately constrains successful transition. Working in FE is a new area for EPs within the Local Authority and they acknowledged a lack of confidence in knowing what FE settings could offer. This is likely to impact on the feasibility of the targets set.

Within the transfer process, the SEND Code of Practice states that 'no one should lose their statement and not have it replaced with an EHC plan simply because the system is changing' (p.15). However, a further constraint identified by a learning support staff member in FE, is that not all statements are transferred to EHCPs meaning that support for some young people ceases. This results in a loss of 'multiple thousands of pounds' (CP4) as well as a lack of clarity on learner needs. This was also discussed in relation to the loss of LDA's discussed below. Whilst the process of transferring statements was not investigated in the present research, this highlights a contradiction between the policy and what the Local Authority are

implementing in practice. It may suggest that the statutory guidance on this process can be interpreted in multiple ways and will differ between authorities.

A final constraint around EHCP's was noted in relation to time. All participants felt that the timescales of statutory work were difficult to meet, with guidance proposing a 6-week turn around in providing information to the Local Authority. Consequently, the amount of time given to the EHCP process leaves little time for those learners on SEN support as argued in section 5.3.

5.2.2 Raising of compulsory school age

The raising of compulsory school leaving age to 18 was intended to reduce the number of young people who become NEET. However, this invariably means that some young people will have to transition between different settings, which is a complex process, particularly for learners with SEN. Research has found that young people with SEBD are more motivated on vocational courses as they can see the relevance of study (Attwood, Croll and Hamilton 2004). As noted by one school SENCO in the present research, sixth forms no longer offer these options. This may be in response to policy changes in 2010 that GCSE-equivalent vocational qualifications do not count towards school league tables (Muir, 2013). Those with SEMH often have associated learning difficulties (Casey, 2006), which means it is often the most vulnerable young people who transition into FE. This can be even more complex for learners who do not have an EHCP to provide continuity in their support.

Prior to the change in compulsory school leaving age, O’Sullivan (2011) highlighted in her work exploring the systems of support in FE, that there was an attitude held by some staff that if young people with SEBD did not want to complete the course then they should leave the setting. Secondary staff in the present research felt that this non-compulsory mentality prevails across college culture. This view was not shared by FE staff who acknowledged that this policy could be a constraint in that not all learners want to be there but additionally it could be a supporting factor in furthering education for vulnerable young people. This disparity in views between settings was prevalent throughout this research and highlights the multi-voicedness and differing realities of transition.

5.3 SEN support

In previous longitudinal research on transitions it was found that young people with BESD without a statement could not recall a transition planning meeting (Dewson et al. 2004; Aston et al. 2005). This suggests that there was not a clear transition process for this group of young people. According to the DfE National Statistics (2016) 17.3% of pupils with SEMH are on SEN support and 12.3% have an EHC. This means that more young people with SEMH will have their needs met through SEN support, which is a graduated approach of assess, plan, do review. Being on SEN support was raised as a constraint by all participant groups in terms of funding and the level of support received in comparison to young people with EHCPs.

Historically, young people entering further education with additional needs and without a statement were supported with a Learning Disability Assessment (Learning

and Skills Act 2000). This was a document put together by the Local Authority to outline a clear plan and up to date assessment of needs in addition to a panel to discuss if the education provider could meet said needs. For learners with SEN support in FE, there is no such document. Prior to the changes in legislation, a case study exploring how EPs, the LA and colleges could work together to support learners with Learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDDs) frequently referenced the support of LDA's in allowing participants to meet a range of learning needs. Secondary staff and FE staff in the present research, acknowledged LDA's as a historical support with a feeling that now they are not in place, the 'simplicity has gone'.

It was noted by all participants that there is no blanket document to outline needs for those with SEMH on SEN support. In terms of tools some secondary school staff talked about transition packs that were put together for learners, however this contradicted with FE staff who felt it was not helpful to receive so many documents. Several participants suggested it would be beneficial to have a generic document for all settings for learners on SEN support to provide continuity. This highlights how questioning in activity theory can lead participants to the next stage in the cycle of expansive learning. At this juncture, some tools and artefacts have been developed but these are not being shared between settings.

Participants felt there is a 'big gap' in terms of supporting those on SEN support and a sense that these young people are 'left to get on with it' (SP7). For secondary staff, this was about not having the time to meet the needs of these learners, particularly

in relation to a supported transition. In addition to a lack of time, FE staff acknowledged difficulties in being able to fund support for learners without an EHCP. Moreover, EPs stated that they are not involved in transition work to FE at the level of SEN support. In terms of division of labour, it is the school that decide EP involvement and supporting transition may not be seen as a priority alongside competing demands. Whilst EHCPs act as a safeguard, it would seem that this is at the expense of those on SEN support who are not subject to the same statutory deadlines and targets.

5.4 Information sharing

Previous research has highlighted information sharing between secondary school and college as an issue that can result in a lack of support for young people with SEBD (O’Riordan, 2011). The present research highlighted information sharing as a constraint on multiple levels, from the confines of legislation such as the Data Protection Act (1998) through to settings not passing information on and young people not wanting to disclose. It was evident through the use of activity theory and exploration of the rules and division of labour in particular that the process of sharing information is unclear.

5.4.1 Collaborative working

The SEND code of practice (2015) states that information from school should be shared in the spring term with FE settings (p.129). However the reality of this happening in practice within this Local Authority is constrained by multiple factors. There was a primary contradiction around information sharing within the rules node,

which highlighted an inconsistency in views of secondary staff and FE staff. Participants in secondary school reported that colleges do not request the information about the young people whilst FE staff discussed school's reluctance to share information with them. There is no clear division of labour around the sharing of information and as highlighted above, no generic documents for those without an EHCP.

Additionally, FE and secondary participants acknowledged concerns over confidentiality and data protection as a hindrance to effective information sharing. Due to uncertainty over what can and cannot be shared, there is no communication to provide cohesive support. Furthermore, some secondary staff were reluctant to share all information for fear over how the college will perceive the learner. This highlights the prevalence of perceived stigma around SEMH discussed in the section below. FE and secondary participants referenced the historical support of connexions and that losing connexions has also meant that the connection between schools, FE and the LA have been lost. Without connexions, there seems to be confusion around what information can and should be shared.

5.4.2 Age of consent

Issues around age of consent further compound complexities over the sharing of information. Despite compulsory school leaving age being raised to 18, the age of consent to make decisions remains at the age of 16. At this stage the SEND Code of Practice (2015) highlights that decision-making rights transfer to the young person and local authorities and agencies should engage directly with them (p.126). Due to

lack of uncertainty over the sharing of information, FE staff reported relying on disclosure of needs by the young people themselves on the FE application form or during initial interviews. However, research has highlighted that some young people may want a fresh start and not want to disclose (Fowler, 2008) which has implications for settings being aware of learner needs.

Age was also identified by FE staff as a constraint in communicating with external services such as CAMHS and when transferring to adult mental health services. The transition from CAMHS to adult services can occur at age, 17, or 18 depending on individual circumstances (CAMHS Transition protocol, 2015). Therefore, students with mental health needs may be engaging in multiple transitions at the same time. FE staff report that adult services will not share information unless the young person gives consent and in some cases the young people do not want services to communicate. This was noted by one EP who reflected on her work with a girl with complex mental health needs who withdrew consent for her to communicate with adult mental health.

One FE support worker talked about some young people that she has worked with not having the confidence to attend services on their own. However due to a lack of information sharing, staff are unaware of appointment dates to offer support to the young people, which can contribute to a breakdown in FE placement. Issues over transferring to adult services have been recognised in America with Mandarino (2014) noting that often youths with mental health needs are not ready to transition to adulthood and 'fall through the cracks' in the transition (p.463).

5.5 Stigma

5.5.1 SEMH difficulties

The stigma attached to having SEMH difficulties has been widely acknowledged. Findings from the present research suggest that this stigma still prevails. As mentioned above, some secondary staff feel reluctant to share all of a child's information in case college decide not to accept them. Despite their intent being good this means that needs are often not identified until later in the year and the right support is not put into place quickly enough. One EP (EP4) wondered whether this is contributing to the high drop out of learners with SEMH. Indeed one FE support worker discussed having to change their application process due to 'so many incidences of things that weren't expected' (CP5). This highlights the development of new tools to mediate the object of activity.

Overall, there were mixed perspectives between participants around stigma. A primary contradiction was highlighted within the rules node with some staff suggesting that there has been a reduction in stigma and acceptance of mental health and other staff suggesting that the young person may want a clean slate. One participant suggested that mental health might be seen as something 'trendy' (SP2) and another suggested that it could be used to excuse behaviour (CP1). Although this participant went on to say 'I'd rather wade through that than nobody talked'. This contrasts with findings from previous research where some staff were suspicious that some young people had additional needs at all (O'Riordan, 2011).

5.5.2 Inclusion of learners with SEMH

A key theme acknowledged by all participant groups was SEMH not being viewed as a primary need. In addition, there was a divide between staff roles, with those in support roles feeling that curriculum staff do not see SEMH as something they should have to deal with. While this was not echoed in the narrative of curriculum staff who contributed to this research, it has been identified in previous studies (O’Sullivan, 2011). One FE staff member talked about losing some young people due to behaviour, which was noted as a constraint. Whilst the narrative in the SEND Code of Practice (2015) has shifted to a recognition that behaviour may be due to underlying mental health issues, punitive approaches are continuing to happen in practice. It is likely that staff not always knowing the needs of learners and not having the knowledge to support those with SEMH compounds this.

5.6 Knowledge of SEMH

5.6.1 Complex needs

The complexity of needs encompassed by the term SEMH is vast and as such it is hard to define exactly what SEMH is. When participants were asked to give their understanding of SEMH, it was clear that the needs are diverse. FE staff recognised particularly vulnerable groups that may fall under the bracket of SEMH, such as unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. Secondary staff acknowledged that SEMH might be secondary to a primary need such as ASD. With such a broad variation in presentation, it is unsurprising that previous research has highlighted professional self-efficacy as a barrier to the inclusion of this group of young people (Armstrong

2014).

The introduction of the term mental health may have increased the uncertainty in managing the needs of these young people. This is further impacted by a lack of training on how to deal with such complex needs. Whilst FE staff and secondary staff acknowledged training as a useful tool in mediating transition, there was a secondary contradiction with the rules, as staff reported that there is not always the time and funding to support training. Particularly in FE, staff discussed having to train themselves on different topics such as self-harm due to lack of support. This led to feelings of incompetence and an awareness that they were not trained to deal with long term mental health needs.

5.6.2 Austerity

Since austerity measures introduced in 2010, there have been significant cuts in public spending and services (Duffy, 2014). This was acknowledged by FE participants who reported a constraint when trying to access external services due to long wait lists and higher thresholds. This led to a feeling that the responsibility to meet complex mental health needs is falling back to FE settings, for which they do not feel adequately trained. Consequently, it is the most vulnerable young people who are being hit by these measures. A report conducted by The Kings Fund, estimated that 40% of mental health trusts have received year on year budget cuts since 2011 (Gilburt, 2015). Additionally, research conducted by the NSPCC found that 1 in 6 children referred to CAMHs in 2015 were turned away (NSPCC, 2015).

This is a much wider systemic problem but ultimately contributes to the unsuccessful transition of young people with SEMH and complex difficulties into FE settings, as their needs are not being met. One EP reflected on a case where transition had been unsuccessful for a young person due to the mental health needs becoming more pronounced. 'It was a lot to take on a new environment, it was an assault on her senses and too much to assimilate alongside changes in personal life with a new diagnosis (EP2)'. This highlights the need for the right support to be in place for these young people.

5.7 Transition Support

5.7.1 Preparation

In Beach's theory of consequential transitions (Beach, 1999) he discusses mediational transition, which is described as a third object to act as a developmental bridge between two systems. Within activity theory, this is represented by the tools, which highlights the artefacts used to mediate the object of activity. FE staff noted transition support such as welcome events and taster sessions as a useful tool in supporting transition. However, secondary school staff highlighted a constraint in being able to support young people to attend these events, as it was difficult to find the time alongside meeting the pressures of GCSE's. Consequently, there was a secondary contradiction for secondary staff between the object of activity as supporting a collaborative transition but not having enough time to do this.

As already discussed, the loss of the connexions service has left a gap which schools and FE settings are finding difficult to fill. The responsibility to provide careers

guidance and advice now lies with schools. The SEND Code of Practice (2015) outlines that it is a statutory duty of schools to provide careers advice from year 8 onwards (p.94). However, in practice participants report that young people often transition to a course that is not right for them. This may explain why the phenomenon of churning has been noted as particularly prevalent in FE where young people repeat and change courses without making progression (Hewett et al. 2015).

As previously noted, FE staff and secondary staff feel there is a mismatch between young people's aspirations and what they can achieve, which makes it difficult when making decisions about future courses to study. In addition, one HLTA felt that parents are often pushing their child towards the wrong course, which further complicates transition. Secondary staff reported that this is additionally constrained by the timing of GCSE results and uncertainty over which setting the young person will transition to. Whilst the Code of Practice (2015) highlights that a contingency plan must be in place for learners who do not achieve their grades, the young people will have already left secondary education by the time they receive their results. Uncertainty over placement also means that colleges are not always able to attend transition reviews, which is a barrier to collaborative working.

5.7.2 Level of Support

The policy on raising the school leaving age was intended to reduce the number of young people who become NEET. However, for some this encompasses a transition between different settings, which is complex, particularly for learners with SEND.

Indeed as recognised by participants, young people with SEMH may have difficulty in social interactions and consequently have less social support than their peers. In addition, participants noted that parents do not always have a role in supporting transition. Thus there is a move towards independence at a time that may be full of uncertainty and as one SENCO pointed out there is nothing to prepare the young people in between.

The level of support needed is not maintained throughout the summer and when the time comes to start in FE, there is often no clear plan in place, particularly for those on SEN support. One secondary participant pointed out that the break between leaving secondary school and starting further education may seem like a long time for young people with SEMH difficulties. Whilst they are perceived as ‘young adults’ they still might require a high level of support. Indeed, previous research exploring the views of young people with SEMH has highlighted the importance of receiving continued support (Attwood, Croll and Hamilton, 2004).

All participants considered support through relationships as a key tool in the transition process, which has also been highlighted in earlier studies (O’Riordan, 2011). As previously mentioned, tools are the mediating artefacts through which new systems of activity are developed. However, there was a primary contradiction highlighted for FE staff in needing to connect with learners within the first 6 weeks but not having the time to see so many young people, thus hindering the development of building supportive relationships. This may lead young people to

feel a lack of belonging to the environment, which Wenger (1998) contends is integral for successful transition to new communities of practice.

5.8 Identity

The sociocultural theories discussed in the literature review, emphasised the shift in identity that takes place during transition. O’Riordan (2015) suggests that this change in identity is particularly difficult for learners with SEMH. The use of activity theory in the present research has been able to identify constraints within transition that contribute to difficulties in supporting this shift. For instance, there is often uncertainty in transition and a lack of time for adults to offer the appropriate support or build relationships with young people.

One of the key themes already discussed, is the mismatch between aspirations and what a young person can achieve. Having misaligned aspirations has been identified as being associated with becoming NEET, particularly for young people from low SES backgrounds (Yates et al. 2011). Zittoun (2008) reflected on the case of a disengaged young person who was experiencing this situation. Within her theory of symbolic transitions and identity rupture, she highlighted how the social frame of the school supported the young person in considering a more realistic career goal or object that made sense to her without damaging her self-identity.

In the present research, secondary staff felt that they could not always find the right time to have conversations with young people about more attainable goals. Thus the responsibility of bridging a shift in identity and development for young people may

fall on the social frame of the FE setting. O’Riordan (2015) posits that having socially acceptable identity verification is important to promote resilience in young people with SEMH. Yet offering this verification in practice may be difficult given the constraints already discussed including the lack of information sharing with FE and their knowledge of learner’s needs. As a result of this, FE staff highlighted that part of their object of activity was to try and identify the primary needs of young people.

An additional factor to consider is that alongside this shift in identity, there may be a change in primary need. Indeed, the relationship between SEBD and other SEN can make it difficult to identify the primary need (DCSF, 2008). This theme was also raised by EPs who noted that the outcome of their work was to provide an up to date picture of current needs and hypotheses. One EP gave a case example of a young person who had an EHCP for cognition and learning but at the time of transitioning into FE, SEMH was their primary need therefore support and interventions required updating in line with this. However as already noted, EPs are not involved with SEN support, which again poses a problem for learners whose needs are being met at this level.

5.9 Pedagogy

In exploring the development of provision for EBD, Daniels and Cole (2002) note that ‘The institutional regulation of tensions between different ideological positions on pedagogy should be an important facet of considerations of current practices’ (p.321). The present research has already highlighted some pedagogic tensions through differing views on how difficult behaviour should be managed with an ‘us

and them' mentality between support staff and curriculum staff. Secondary staff also held the perception that FE staff still see college as non-compulsory and send out this message. Although as discussed this was not evidenced by FE participants in this study.

The different pedagogic approach taken in FE settings has been noted by learners in previous research as helpful (Attwood, Croll and Hamilton, 2004). In addition, the range of courses on offer in FE better caters to the needs of learners with SEN. However as emphasised throughout this section, the process of transition is highly complex. It was raised by one EP that if learners stay in the same setting, then transition is likely to be positive. However, It was recognised as a constraint by secondary staff that the most vulnerable learners are the most likely to move settings when perhaps it should be the other way around.

There was a contradiction in considering the change in environment and move towards independent learning. Secondary school staff felt like this was too much for young people to cope with and there was an expectation that young people will have 'grown an extra brain to self study' (SP2) over the summer. In contrast, FE staff felt that the increase in independence is a supportive rule and reduces the incidents of behaviour that are often seen in the secondary environment. A further contradiction was highlighted between one EP reporting that FE settings are not flexible enough in terms of adapting pedagogy to learners with SEMH yet FE staff discussed the need to be flexible to learners needs and move them between courses to find the right

option. This demonstrates a lack of communication between subject groups and differing perceptions of settings, which has been prevalent throughout this research.

5.10 Environmental factors

As emphasised by activity theory, it is important to understand the social and cultural context in which activity takes place. The Local Authority, in which this research was undertaken, has lower educational attainment and higher levels of poverty than the national average in addition to high levels of immigration. Appreciation of these wider factors was mainly demonstrated by FE staff, which suggests this is reflective of the reality of transition that they have to manage. One FE staff member reported feeling that colleges have to take an extra responsibility to look what's happening outside of college. Perhaps this links to the move towards independence in FE and less parental involvement, which was highlighted by FE and secondary staff.

Again there was a contradiction between the viewpoints held by secondary staff and FE staff. One SENCO felt that colleges were not good at thinking about supporting additional personal needs such as transport to college or where a young person might eat. However, this was in direct contradiction to FE staff who talked about ensuring that underlying needs are met so that young people are ready for learning. One FE staff member referenced making sure food parcels were sent home for learners who may not have enough money to feed themselves.

The reality presented by FE settings who took part in this research demonstrates that staff are going above what is expected as part of their role to support transition. In a reflection on the philosophical standpoints of SEN in FE (Spenceley, 2012) notes that provision supporting personal development often falls outside of the funding remit and is 'generally left to the discretion and values of the institution and is increasingly subsumed within the role of the educator or support worker under the guise of inclusive practice' (p.318).

In light of these wider cultural issues, FE participants frequently voiced frustration at there being a blanket policy in terms of targets and attainment without recognising the differing demographics between settings. There was a secondary contradiction between the expectation that colleges will retain students but FE not always being the right environment, which may result in unsuccessful transition, as highlighted in the case described above. This then has implications for funding, as institutions that have a low retention rate will receive less funding from the Government in the future (Education Funding Agency 2015). Armstrong and Hallet (2012) suggest that there remains a dichotomy between achievement and inclusion of young people with SEBD, which may be fuelling exclusion of this group.

The expectation that all settings can achieve the same is unrealistic without an understanding of the demographics. Norwich and Eaton (2015) argue that the individual characteristics and contextual factors of children need to be taken into account to meet the wide ranging needs encompassed under the SEN category of SEMH and that we should be working towards a bio-psycho-social model. However,

current policy does not allow for this and the change in guidance does not address the fundamental issues pertaining to SEMH.

5.11 Summary of chapter

This chapter has discussed the wealth of issues that were raised by participants in response to questions about transition. Many of these issues relate to differing perceptions and realities of what is happening in the transition process and a lack of communication between settings and individuals. In addition, multiple constraints were highlighted at a much wider cultural level that are impacting on the activity of transition for young people with SEMH. This will be reflected on in relation to the research questions in the final chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The findings of this research have illuminated the complexities involved in transition of young people with SEMH and show it to be a complicated and multi-faceted picture. Key themes arising from previous literature in this area have highlighted stigma, changes in identity and the importance of relationships and support (e.g. Fowler, 2008; O’Riordan, 2011; O’Sullivan, 2011; Attwood, Croll and Hamilton 2004). The same themes were also identified in the present research. The use of activity theory enabled these themes to be explored through a macro rather than a micro level of analysis and illuminate what is happening in the activity of transition within a historical and organisational context.

This chapter will bring together the findings of this research in relation to the research aims and questions. Reflections on the research and implications for professional practice will be discussed before offering concluding comments. Whilst the findings of this research are specific to the local authority in which it took place, triangulating the findings with previous research allows for a broad and detailed picture and allows for the reader to judge applicability to their own context.

6.2 Reviewing the research aims and questions

The aim of the present research was to find out what is happening in the process of transition from mainstream secondary school into further education for young people with SEMH, with a view to highlighting areas for development in the future.

6.2.1 Question 1. What supports the transition of young people with SEMH into further education?

There were many supportive elements that participants recognised were already working well within the process of transition. All participants reflected that the outcome of their work was to ensure that young people with SEMH have the best, that they achieve and that their voice is heard. This was the main driver of transition support. Participants referenced the SEND Code of Practice (2015) as being supportive in ensuring that support for young people with SEN is person centred. The introduction of EHCPs was noted as an additional support from this policy as it helps to outline young people's strengths and needs in a clear way.

One of the biggest supports identified was building positive relationships, both with the young people themselves and between other adults involved in the process. In relation to young people, many participants in secondary and FE settings talked about knowing pupils individually and treating them all with respect, which likely contributes to a feeling of belonging and connectedness for the young people. Having a person centred approach was evident throughout the narrative of participants. In terms of relationships with other adults, participants felt it was helpful to build rapport with staff between settings as this supported information sharing and clarity in transition. In order to foster these positive relationships, all participants discussed personal attributes, such as compassion as tools that help to mediate the process of transition.

6.2.2 Question 2. What constrains the transitions of young people with SEMH into further education?

As discussed above there are many factors in place that support transition. However there were also a multitude of factors highlighted that act as a barrier in enabling this positive practice. Key in these constraints was the sharing of information between settings and services. This was particularly prevalent in relation to learners whose needs were being met at the level of SEN support. Indeed for those on SEN support there is no clear process in place and they are not subject to the same support as those at EHCP level. EPs referenced not being involved at the level of SEN support and secondary staff felt that due to the time demands of EHCPs, they did not have the time. Additionally, FE staff felt like SEMH was not seen as something that could 'kick start' the EHCP process, which means many young people with SEMH have their needs met through SEN support.

A further key constraint recognised was the complexity of needs that these young people present with. There have been multiple changes in terminology over time but the present term still does not capture the wide-ranging needs encompassed under this bracket. FE staff in particular referenced exceptionally vulnerable groups who may have SEMH difficulties due to their life experiences such as unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. It has been proposed that in order to meet the needs of young people with SEMH that each case needs to be considered on its individual context and circumstances (Norwich and Eaton 2015). It is unsurprising that there is uncertainty from staff and a lack of knowledge around how to meet SEMH needs.

This problem is further compounded by austerity measures and cuts to services such as CAMHS who have the expertise to support these highly complex cases.

6.2.3 What is the role of the EP, if any, in the transition process?

Within the Educational Psychology Service in which this research took place, EPs have not historically been involved in further education. EPs referenced the introduction of the new Code of Practice as a being helpful in bringing them into working in this area. However, this was only in relation to the transfer of statements into Education Health and Care Plans. There is not yet a service level agreement in place with FE settings to facilitate EP work in this area, which is confined by high levels of statutory work for EPs and limited capacity. In addition, school SENCOs decide whether EP's have a role in supporting transition and with limited EP time, this may not be seen as a priority. Consequently, FE staff and secondary staff did not recognise EPs as part of the transition process and reported that EPs in FE is not 'a thing'.

Previous research has highlighted that the contribution from EPs has been particularly valuable in primary and secondary school in cases of complex needs and the 'management of student behaviour, transition, provision and placement' (Farrell et al. 2006, p.40). Although the benefits of post-16 EP transition work have been recognised (Mackay, 2009) this is still a new area for many EPs to learn how to navigate and for FE settings to understand what they can offer. EPs felt that their role in FE could be at a consultative level. Based on the findings from this research I

would argue that in addition to this, EPs can also offer support in terms of training on how to manage different needs and at the level of assessment and intervention.

6.2.4 How are secondary schools and colleges working together in the transition process?

Whilst secondary schools and colleges acknowledge the importance of collaborative working, in practice this is constrained by elements such as time, ambiguity over what information should be shared, stigma, consent, and uncertainty over which destination the young person will attend. EHCPs provide some clarity to these processes but for those on SEN support, there is no clear process in place to outline and share needs. When exploring division of labour in the transition process, it was evident that the roles are unclear without a formal pathway or structure. All participants discussed this as a problem. In response, some settings have already begun to develop their own tools and processes to support the transition for these learners but there is still no consistency in how this information is related between settings.

6.3 Implications for Professional Practice

In terms of Engeström's cycle of expansive learning referenced briefly in chapter 3, this research has moved through the first two stages, namely questioning and examining the primary and secondary contradictions in the activity of transition. All participants that took part in the research felt strongly that the transition of young people with SEMH is something that needs to improve. It is hoped that once shared with participants the results of this research can move the activity through the next

stages of expansive learning to develop new practices and artifacts that support transition, so that history does not continue to repeat itself. This is discussed further in section 6.4 below. Based on this research, key areas to focus on in the future are suggested as follows:

- **Developing clear role definitions for staff involved in the transition process in both secondary school and further education colleges.** A document such as a simple flow diagram, outlining staff roles at different stages of the process, alongside contact details may be beneficial for each setting to share.
- **Improving communication between settings.** This may include raised awareness of data protection and what can and cannot be shared in addition to greater awareness of who to contact as proposed above. Staff should also ensure that explanation is provided to the young person on why it may be important to share information between the adults supporting them, so that they can give informed consent.
- **Developing new tools to outline and support the needs of learners at the level of SEN support.** This could be done through the introduction of one page profiles outlining the key strengths and difficulties for each learner as this would provide a concise overview that staff can then continue to develop.
- **Reviewing support to ensure any changes in primary need are captured.** It would be beneficial for staff to review a young person's needs prior to the move into further education so that the new setting can provide the appropriate support. This could be done through the one page profile as proposed above.

- **Considering ways to promote support and continuity for young people in the time between leaving secondary school and reaching further education.**

This will depend on staff capacity and working hours but could be as simple as a phone call to young people during the summer to ensure that they feel supported and know information such as which date they will start the term and where they need to go.

- **Ensuring that the aspirations and targets set for young people are realistic and achievable through collaborative target setting between the young person, secondary school, FE and EPs.**

- **Increasing knowledge and awareness of SEMH and how to manage the range of complex needs presented – (to increase staff skills and reduce stigma).** This could be done through continued professional development and training. Training should be disseminated to all staff so that there is a shared understanding that supporting young people with SEMH is everybody's responsibility.

- **EPs would benefit from developing their knowledge of FE infrastructure.**

This could be supported through building relationships with staff in FE and collaborative target setting as outlined above.

- **EPs to develop working practices to support the issues outlined above.** This will depend on service level agreements and capacity to deliver work, however EPs can support in many of the above aspects for example in delivering training or reviewing the support in place for young people. EPs can also help to develop the transition process further as described in section 6.4 below.

In addition there are further areas for consideration at a wider policy level that cannot be addressed by education settings alone. There are highlighted as follows:

- **Education settings are judged on the same measures without recognition of demographics or levels of need.**
- **Many schools no longer offer vocational courses due to league table reforms (Muir, 2013) which means often it is the most vulnerable learners who have to transition.**
- **Austerity measures have impacted significantly on support and services available to vulnerable young people.**

6.4 Impact of Research and Future Directions

One of the strengths of activity theory is that it is not just an analytic framework but it has the capacity to be used as a tool for organisational development (Leadbetter, 2008). As outlined above, this research has moved through the first two stages of Engeström's (1999) cycle of expansive learning, through questioning current practices and highlighting contradictions within the process of transition. Next steps could draw on developmental work research (DWR) (Engeström, 1999b), which is an approach that emphasises collaborative learning and the production of new knowledge and solutions.

It is beyond the scope of the present research to go into detail on this methodology however in brief, DWR would involve using the current findings to model to participants what is happening in the transition process for young people with

SEMH, during a series of workshops. The workshops would be reflective and interactive, inviting participants to comment and build on the model presented. In this way, participants across secondary school, further education and the educational psychology service, would be able to come together and develop a shared model of work, which would help to develop new practices to support the transition process.

At present, the findings of this research have been summarised in a report and shared with participants who took part (see appendix 10). The majority of participants discussed wanting to be part of a working group that can help to develop the process of transition. It is hoped that EPs who took part will be able to use the present research to facilitate the running of workshops using DWR to promote the transformation of practices in transition for young people with SEMH.

6.5 Reflections on Research

The aim of the present research was to explore the process of transition for young people with SEMH. Activity theory provided a useful framework to explore what is happening at an organisational level. However, as noted through discussion of sociocultural theories of educational transition in section 2.4, transition as a process involves an understanding of the institution or setting and how this influences a shift in identity in the individual. Therefore, in order to fully understand transition as a process, it would have been beneficial to gather the views of the young people involved. Consequently, the absence of child's voice could be considered a limitation of this research. However, themes from the present research were discussed in

relation to previous studies highlighting young people's views, in order to triangulate the findings.

A strength of activity theory and a key guiding principle is the consideration of historical influences on understanding how a system has come into being (Daniels, 2001a). The present research did not focus solely on a historical analysis of transition but aimed to draw out some important aspects that may have contributed to how the process works at present. This was highlighted through brief discussion of the changing government policies and views of SEMH presented in section 2.7, in addition to participant's reflections on historical supports such as the role of connexions.

A criticism of activity theory is that it does not place enough emphasis on the role of the individual within the collective nature of work (Leadbetter, 2008). Participants in the present research discussed their individual subject roles during interview, however due to the amount of data presented, the different perspectives between subject positions could not be analysed. Given the differences alluded to between curriculum staff views and those working in specific SEN roles, this may be an area for future investigation.

Furthermore, themes were highlighted in this research around wider contextual issues, such as local authority and government policy, however it was beyond the scope of this research to consider these in detail. Future investigation could use third generation activity theory (Engeström, 1999b) to look at the relationships and

competing objects of activity between the different systems that will be impacting on the process of transition for young people with SEMH.

6.6 Concluding Comments

Whilst the rhetoric of inclusion prevails, there appears to be incongruence between espoused theory and the reality of what can be achieved in practice. Although settings are striving to support the transition needs of learners with SEMH they are constrained by Government policy and the expectations placed on them. 'Inspections of practice often reveal activity systems in which the object may have shifted but where the tools, divisions of labour and rules have not changed' (Daniels and Cole 2002, p.323). There are many topics that this research has highlighted, which I hope will contribute to further development of the processes in place to support young people with SEMH to successfully transition into further education. Unfortunately, some of the fundamental issues lie beyond the remit of education settings and EPs to tackle alone and need to be addressed at a much wider level.

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